Reflections on the Mahābharata War

294.5923

037
116

ACC No 25781

M.A. Mehendale

037
116

Reflections
on
the Mahābhārata War

M.A. MEHENDALE

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY
RASHTRAPATI NIVAS, SHIMLA-171005

CHAPTER 1

The Mahābhārata War – A *dharmayuddha* ?

The Focus of this study is the war between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, fought at Kurukṣetra and which is called a *dharmayuddha* (*dharmayuddham ayudhyanta* 7.164.10).[1] In this chapter, we will examine the meaning of this word as well as the extent to which the epic war can be called a *dharmayuddha*. With respect to the latter, the examination will be a detailed one.

The term *dharmayuddha* may mean: 'a war fought as a duty (*dharma*) by a Kṣatriya'. Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna at the beginning of the Gītā that there was nothing more beneficial to a Kṣatriya than to fight an unavoidable war in consonance with one's duty as a Kṣatriya (*dharmyād dhi yuddhac chreyo 'nyat kṣatriyasya na vidyate* 6.24.31).

Now what was this *kṣatradharma*, 'the duty of a Kṣatriya', which compelled Arjuna to fight the war? The answer is found in Kuntī's message to Yudhiṣṭhira through Kṛṣṇa. She told Yudhiṣṭhira to follow the example of prince Saṁjaya of the Sindhu country. Saṁjaya's enemies had deprived him of his kingdom which was an act of injustice. To regain the unlawfully usurped kingdom, even if it meant taking recourse to violence and slaying the enemy in battle, was the prince's duty, the duty of a Kṣatriya. Hence Vidurā, the mother of prince Saṁjaya, exhorted him to take up arms and said "kill your enemies, and follow the *dharma* of a Kṣatriya (*jahi śatrūn raṇe rājan svadharmam anupālaya* 5.132.35).[2] Yudhiṣṭhira was willing to settle for a compromise and thereby avoid the war if the Kauravas parted with five villages. But this was unacceptable to Kuntī, who viewed such an act as tantamount to beggarliness and antithetical to the *dharma* of a Kṣatriya.

The share of the ancestral kingdom which Yudhiṣṭhira had lost in the game of dice should have been returned by Duryodhana as per the contract of the said game. Duryodhana's refusal to honour the contract was an injustice perpetrated on the Pāṇḍavas. Since resistance to such injustice was the duty of a Kṣatriya, Kuntī told Yudhiṣṭhira: "Get back the paternal share of which you are deprived' (*pitryam aṁśaṁ mahābāho nimagnaṁ punar uddhara* 5.130.20*)*.[3]

---

[1] All references, unless otherwise indicated, are to the Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata, published by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune.

[2] Also 5.130.12.

If this interpretation of '*dharmayuddha*' is the yardstick then the Kurukṣetra war turns out to be a *dharmayuddha* for the Pāṇḍavas, but not for the Kauravas.

The expression *dharmayuddha* can also have a different meaning. It may mean 'a war fought according to the rules (*dharma*) of the war'. This meaning is exemplified in the expression *gaccha yudhyasva dharmeṇa* (5.180.17), Paraśurāma's words to Bhīṣma. There were certain generally accepted norms of warfare which the warring parties were expected to observe while in combat. In addition, they could agree to some other specific rules which were binding. The side which observed these rules during the war could be said to have fought a *dharmayuddha*, but this would not apply to the violator. It is noteworthy that, if we accept this particular meaning, we cannot immediately declare that the Pāṇḍavas fought a *dharmayuddha* simply because they fought against injustice. We shall have to reserve our judgement until we have examined what the rules of the war were and how far they were observed or transgressed by one or both of the parties.

It should now be evident that if we accept the first meaning, the issue of *dharmayuddha* depends on the ends and not the means; since the ends are known before actual combat, whether a war is a *dharmayuddha* or not can be decided beforehand. In the case of the second meaning, however, the issue depends on the means, not the ends, and hence the issue can be decided only after the war was over.

Now we proceed to examine in detail the *dharmayuddha* issue in the light of the second meaning, taking into account the theory and the actual practice on the ground by the heroes on both sides during the epic war.

---

[3] Cf. 2.67. 9-12.

The sole basis of judging whether the epic war was or was not fought according to the rules is the description of the war in the Mahābhārata. As is well known, the war-incidents were reported by Saṁjaya to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. In this light, a brief examination of the nature of Saṁjaya's description is worthwhile, especially to dispel prevailing and widespread misconceptions.

We are informed that Vyāsa granted Saṁjaya, a charioteer (*sūta*), 'divine vision' or clairvoyance (*divyadṛṣṭi*) to enable him to report the battlefield incidents to Dhṛtarāṣṭra (6.16.8-9). This faculty, granted for a definite period, has been generally totally misunderstood. It is widely believed, even by those who ought to know, that, blessed with this faculty, Saṁjaya sat with Dhṛtarāṣṭra in his chamber at Hāstinapura, and from there he could see the happenings on the battlefield, which he related to Dhṛtarāṣṭra as a sort of a running commentary. But this is not what the Mahābhārata tells us, not even by way of an interpolated passage, and is thus not true.

According to the evidence available in the Mahābhārata, we must first note that Saṁjaya's reports were not running commentaries but after-accounts. When Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa and others fell, i.e. after the first ten days of war, then after five, then two, and finally when the war ended respectively, Saṁjaya returned to Hāstinapura from the battlefield and reported all that had occurred during those intervals. In this context, if an eyewitness reports battlefield incidents to those absent from the battlefield, it is bound to be an after-account. By the fact of being a *sūta* or a charioteer, Saṁjaya is necessarily presupposed to be an eyewitness. However, it is important for us to know that Saṁjaya did not take part in the war as a charioteer.

More importantly, the Mahābhārata tells us that Saṁjaya acted as a war-reporter. He was actually present on the battlefield – very likely in the company of other reporters like him – , witnessed the events, and then reported such to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Hence, all the verbal forms of Samjaya's reportage are in the past tense and not in the present tense. For example, he does not say: 'I now see the skill of the pupils of Droṇa, oh Dhṛtarāṣṭra' (*lāghavaṁ droṇa-śiṣyāṇāṁ paśyāmi bharatarṣabha*), but rather: 'I saw the skill displayed by the pupils of Droṇa, oh Dhṛtarāṣṭra' (*lāghavaṁ* *droṇaśiṣyāṇām apaśyaṁ bharatarṣabha* 6.42.21).

A third point to be noted in this connection is that this reporter was a partisan, definitely on the side of the Kauravas. This can be inferred on the basis of the following evidence:

(i) When, at one stage in the war, Ghaṭotkaca employed his trickery (*māyā*), the Kauravas began to flee. Saṁjaya's response, along with Bhīṣma, was to exhort the Kaurava army not to flee but to fight, as what they were seeing was not factual but only a *māyā* of Ghaṭotkaca (6.90.43-44).There is no record of Saṁjaya similarly exhorting the Pāṇḍava army whenever they were on the run.

(ii) At the end of each day during the war, there were consultations in the respective camps of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. Saṁjaya participated in such deliberations only in the camp of the Kauravas (7.157.19; 7.158.4).

(iii) Towards the end of the war, after the fall of Śalya, Saṁjaya no longer remained a reporter, but himself took part in the war on the side of the Kauravas (9.24.47-51). He fought with Dhṛṣṭadyumna, was defeated, fled from the battle, was subsequently attacked by Sātyaki, fell unconscious and was made captive by Sātyaki. Later, about to be killed by Sātyaki, he was saved by the timely intervention of Vyāsa (9.28.35-38).

In the light of Saṁjaya being a war-reporter present on the battlefield, the meaning of the 'divine vision' or *divyadṛṣṭi* granted by Vyāsa needs to be examined. The battle accounts of Saṁjaya suggest that he was present on every spot of the battlefield – an obvious impossibility. Moreover, he also reported to Dhṛtarāṣṭra all the conver-sations that took place on the battlefield, the most notable example being the 'Bhagavad-Gītā',a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. That Saṁjaya heard all these conversations defies belief. Another astonishing fact is that he also told Dhṛtarāṣṭra what occasionally transpired in the minds of the heroes (6.2.8-11; 6.16.8-9). The only possibility of Saṁjaya's knowing all this narrows down to the element of 'divine vision', which of course, enabled him to know what he could not directly see or hear. And this is exactly what Saṁjaya tells us. He says that some part of the war he saw with his own eyes and some by the power of *yoga*, an obvious reference to divine vision granted by Vyāsa, (*pratyakṣaṁ yan mayā dṛṣṭaṁ, dṛṣṭaṁ yogabalena ca*

6.16.5).

Having now thus clearly seen the role of Saṁjaya as a reporter of the war and the nature of his reportage, we may now return to the examination of the question: how far can the Kurukṣetra war be looked upon as a *dharmayuddha* in the sense that it was a war fought according to prescribed and mutually agreed upon rules.

We have first to find out what those rules were. For this purpose the *Mahābhārata* will be the sole basis of evidence, and the rules of war which may have been mentioned in other Sanskrit texts like the Smṛtis or the Arthaśāstra will not be taken into account.

As for the rules found in the *Mahābhārata*, there are two kinds: (1) general, and (2) specific. The second category specifically applies to the war fought by the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. No doubt some rules are common to both categories.

The general rules of war are mentioned at three places in the account of the war itself, and are reported in certain incidents. These are the following:

1. In the 'Karṇaparvan' when Yudhiṣṭhira told Arjuna to give his Gāṇḍīva bow to someone else, Arjuna made ready to kill Yudhiṣṭhira. In order to dissuade Arjuna from doing so, Kṛṣṇa stated that certain persons were not supposed to be killed. Such persons, in Kṛṣṇa's words, were: "The one who is not fighting, who does not have a weapon in his hand, who is running away from the battlefield, or one who, with folded hands, is seeking refuge – such a person is not be killed" (8.49.22).

2. The second instance is also found in 'Karṇaparvan'. Karṇa, caught in a difficult situation, pleaded with Arjuna to desist shooting an arrow at him temporarily. He reminded Arjuna : "In a war, a true hero is not supposed to strike his opponent who has laid down his arms in submission, who is in difficulty, whose arrows are exhausted, whose armour has been cut, or whose weapon has dropped down or has been broken" (8.66.62-63).

3. The third instance is found in the 'Droṇaparvan'. Bhūriśravas, his arm being severed by Arjuna, rebuked him thus: "A spirited warrior does not strike against an opponent who is engaged in a battle with some one else, one who has lost consciousness, one who is running away, one whose chariot is

broken, one who has submitted himself and is begging for life, or one who is in difficulty" (7.118.7-8; 7.131.3).

All these references provide information on the generally accepted rules for fighting a just war.

Besides the aforesaid, there is another incident in the 'Śāntiparvan', recording general rules and these were Bhīṣma's reply to an enquiry by Yudhiṣṭhira. These rules cover almost all the situations cited in the three preceding references. In addition, they lay down:

1. The fight should be one against one, and not many against one.
2. One should first issue a challenge to the opponent and not strike him unawares.
3. The fight should be between equals, i.e. a charioteer should engage a charioteer and not a cavalry man a charioteer.
4. The arrows should not have a *karṇa* at the point, nor should the arrowheads be poison-tipped. (12.96.7-11).

Now that the generally accepted rules have been enumerated, we will concern ourselves with the main subject of our investigation: the specific rules laid down for the epic war. The Kauravas and the Pāñcāla-Pāṇḍavas agreed on a certain code of conduct on the eve of the war. They called this code a 'contract', an 'agreement' (*samaya*), and its detailed clauses, the 'rules' (*dharma*) (*tatas te samayaṁ cakruḥ,* and *dharmāṁś ca saṁsthāpayām āsuḥ* (6.1.26, 33).

These mutually agreed upon rules may be listed as follows (with some changes in the order in which they have been actually listed in the text):

1. In the war, no one was to be taken unawares. A challenge had to be first issued to the opponent to draw his attention. (It was of course implied that if the challenge was not accepted, no combat took place) (*samābhāṣya prharatavyam* 6.1.30).
2. If some one intiated a verbal duel, the reply was to be in words. This seems to have meant that one *must* reply in fitting terms to the opponent's verbal tirade, and that one should not shoot arrows at the opponent before he has had his say (*vācā yuddhe pravṛtte no vācaiva pratiyodhanam* 6.1.28).
3. Duels should take place between equals. This rule had two

(or three) aspects:

(i) 'equal' in the sense of using the same kind of conveyance. A cavalryman should challenge a cavalryman; an elephant-rider, an elephant-rider; a charioteer, a charioteer; and an infantryman, an infantryman (*rathī ca rathīnā yodhyo gajena gajadhūrgataḥ / aśvenāśvī padātiś ca padātenaiva bhārata* 6.1.29).

(ii) 'equal' meant fighting with matching weapons: an archer fought with an archer, a swordsman with a swordsman, and so on and so forth.

(iii) 'equal' meant that the opponent chosen should be of the same level as the challenger in terms of age, pre-paredness, strength and energy (*yathāyogaṁ yathāvīryaṁ yathotsāhaṁ yathāvayaḥ (prahartavyam* 6.1.30).

4. One should not strike another if he was in any of the following situations:

(i) One who stood assured that no one would attack him (*na viśvaste* 6.1.30);

(ii) One who fainted due to a severe blow (*na vihvale* 6.1.30);

(iii) One who was inattentive for some reason or the other (*pamattaḥ* (*na hantavyaḥ*) 6.1.31);

(iv) One who was already engaged in combat with another (*pareṇa saha saṁyuktaḥ* 6.1.31);

(v) One whose weapons were exhausted or one who had lost his armour (*kṣīṇaśastro vivarmā ca* 6.1.31);

(vi) One who had turned away from the battlefield (*vimukhas tathā* 6.1.31; *niṣkrāntaḥ pṛtanāmadhyān na hantavyaḥ kathaṁcana* 6.1.28).

5. The fifth rule was very important. It stipulated that the chariooter, the horses yoked to the chariot, the supplier of arms, and those sounding the instruments like *bherīs* and conches should not be attacked with weapons (*na sūteṣu na dhuryeṣu na ca saśtropanāyiṣu/na bherīśaṅkhavādeṣu prahartvyaṁ kathaṁcana//* 6.1.32).

6. The last rule had no direct bearing on the conduct of the war. It simply expressed the pious wish that at the end of the war, the two parties should bear no malice towards each other, and there should be no further attempt at deception (*nivṛtte caiva no yuddhe prītiś ca syāt parasparam / yathāpūrvam yathāyogaṁ na ca*

syāc chalanaṁ punaḥ 6.1.27).

These were the rules specifically agreed upon by the two parties fighting the epic war. They naturally include some of the rules mentioned under the heading of 'general' rules. But they also include some important additions and omissions, reference to which will be made at appropriate places in the discussion which immediately follows.

In order to decide the question whether the war was fought according to the rules or not, we have to examine whether each individual *dharma* listed was observed or transgressed by the warriors on both sides.

1. The first *dharma* concerned the issuing of a challenge. In those ancient times, warriors did not believe in modern pre-emptive measures. A warrior, even on the battlefield, was not to be taken unawares. Hence a challenge was first issued to the opponent, usually in terms like : "Wait, wait, do not by-pass me, here I stand, fight with me first" (*tiṣṭha tiṣṭha, mā gāḥ asāv aham amutra* 6.43.28,32; 6.55.7; 7.35.17-18; 8.9.23; 8.18.1; 8.42.19).

Occasionally the challenger announced his name or *gotra* while making a bid to combat (7.35.43; 8.36.37-38). Droṇa, it appears, was particularly fond of this procedure (*tataḥ punar api droṇo nāma viśrāvayan yudhi/ akarod raudram ātmānaṁ kirañ śaraśataiḥ parān//* 7.7.14; *tato droṇo maheśvāso nāma viśrāvya saṁyuge/ śarair anekasāhasraiḥ pāṇḍaveyān vyamohayat //* 7.101.45).[4]

The acceptance of the challenge was conveyed by the opponent with words like : "All right, start striking" (*tathā, prahara* 8.15.19).

Barring a few exceptions, it can be said that this first *dharma* was scrupulously followed by heroes on both sides. The exceptions will be dealt with later at suitable places.

2. The second *dharma* is related to the verbal duels. We are informed that these verbal duels involved pointing out past lapses in the conduct of the opponent or some blemish in his family (*yasya yad dhi raṇe nyaṅgaṁ pitṛto mātṛto 'pi vā/ karmataḥ śīlato vāpi sa tac chrāvayate yudhi* 8.35.57).

---

[4] A fighter might raise the arrow in his hand while issuing the challenge 8.12.18-19.

But not all wordy combats stooped so low. Yudhiṣṭhira castigated Aśvatthāman for forgoing the duties of a Brāhmaṇa and for taking up arms, which was the proper role only for a Kṣatriya. He, therefore, addressed Aśvatthāman as a "Brāhmaṇa in name" (*brāhmaṇabruva, brahmabandhu*). Aśvatthāman, however, without joining Yudhiṣṭhira in the wordy duel, started the battle straight-away (8.39.32-35: *droṇaputraḥ smayann iva/...nottaraṁ kiṁcid abravīt// anuktvā ca tataḥ kiṁcic charavarṣeṇa pāṇḍavam chādayām āsa . . .*).

But the same Aśvatthāman abused Dhṛṣṭadyumna calling him the 'bane of the Pāñcālas' (*pāñcālāpasada*) and warned him to be prepared for the punishment for killing Droṇa. Dhṛṣṭadyumna retorted: "My sword will give a fitting reply to your abuse. I cut off the head of your father; how can you escape?" (8.42.23-27).

Nakula was no match for Karṇa. However, he initiated verbal combat with him. He accused Karṇa of being the root cause of the enmity between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas and boastfully declared: "I shall kill you today and shall have done my duty." Karṇa replied: "One should first act and then feel proud about it. Well, we are here ready to see your heroism in the battle" (8.17.49-54; for a verbal duel between Karṇa and Yudhiṣṭhira cf. 8.33.11-12).

These are a few examples of the verbal duels that took place during the war. It is reported in the epic that a fierce verbal duel occurred between Bhīma and Duryodhana, in which both 'skinned' each other (*anoynyaṁ vāgbhir ugrābhis takṣamāṇau vyavasthitau* 9.54.43; *tato vāgyuddham abhavat tumulam* 9.55.1). Unfortunately or fortunately, this verbal duel has not been reported in full; we have only a small specimen of it in which Bhīma blamed Duryodhana for having forced the Pāṇḍavas to go through a number of arduous situations. He also held Duryodhana responsible for the deaths of Bhīṣma and others. Duryodhana's reply was simply: "No use talking too much; come, translate your words into action" (*vāṇī saṁpadyatām eṣā karmaṇā* 9.55.27-39).

It can safely be said that this second *dharma* regarding verbal combat was satisfactorily observed by both sides. There is no instance of a hero being slain before he finished his verbal attack.

3. The third *dharma* is concerned with combat between equals.

(i) As noticed above, one of the meanings of "fight between equals" was that a foot-soldier fought with a foot-soldier, a charioteer with a charioteer, etc.

The duels between the major heroes of the war were mainly along these lines as most of them rode in chariots. But there were occasional exceptions, e.g. when Uttara, riding an elephant, combated Śalya in a chariot (6.45.35-36), or when Duryodhana, on elephant-back, combated Bhīma who was in his chariot (7.25.4,13). However, it was extremely difficult for ordinary soldiers to observe this rule in the tumult of battle. From Saṁjaya's descriptions it appears that usually, everday, when the battle commenced the ordinary soldiers also fought with their equals (6.43.79; 6.44.4-6; 6.56.15-16; 8.7.42; 8.8.2). But soon afterwards a free-for-all developed, there then no longer being any question of fighting with one's equals. Such uneven encounters were called *saṁkula, vyākula, nirmaryāda yuddha* (6.43.30, 80-82;6.44.2, 22,29; 6.56.18-19; 6.113.2-4; 8.8.10-12). Since the combatants of both warring parties knew that observance of this rule on a large scale was not possible, no one on either side ever complained about its violations.

(ii) "Fight between equals" also meant that the weaponry used by opposing combatants be of the same kind, that is, an archer versus an archer, a swordsman versus a swordsman, etc.

In order to understand the implication of this regulation, it is essential to look into the manner in which the duels were fought, and how they usually ended.

First, it must be put on record that not all duels ended when one of the two combatants died. Had this been the case, the epic war would have ended much sooner than the eighteen days it actually lasted. Of course, some duels did end, as they had to, at the death of one of the two engaged – e.g. the duel between Karṇa and Arjuna, between Abhimanyu and the son of Duḥśāsana, between Uttara and Śalya, etc.

But many duels ended with a simple defeat of the opponent, this not being fatal but in the form of forcing the opponent to retire from combat for one of the following five reasons. A warrior retired from combat in the following situations:

(a) if his chariot was broken, or if all his weapons were exhausted. Usually on such occasions the defeated warrior mounted a compatriot's and left the duel unfinished (6.69.36; 7.108.33;7.109.1; 7.111.7; 7.114.45; 8.32.66).

(b) if the chariot's horses were rendered unmanageable due to either the charioteer's reins being cut or the charioteer being slain. The horses then ran helter-skelter and the duel had to end (6.50.105; 6.68.27-29; 8.12.68). This happened even when the chariot was undamaged.

(c) if he swooned. In such cases, the charioteers drove the chariots away from the battleground. There are numerous examples of such incidents, but it is not necessary to cite all of them. To cite just one instance at random, when Duḥśāsana swooned while fighting with Abhimanyu, his charioteer took him away (7.39,12; few other references are 6.54. 15-17; 6.79.54; 8.11.40-41; etc.).

(d) if he considered himself unequal to his opponent, took fright, and fled. Even major heroes were guilty of ending combat thus. Virāṭa ran away while fighting with Droṇa (6.78.23); Karṇa did the same on two occasions while fighting with Bhīma (7.109.33; 7.114.84); even Droṇa once turned his back fighting with Ghaṭotkaca (6.85.1).[5]

(e) if the sun set. This was, of course, beyond their control and thus they cannot be held responsible.

However, there was one exception to the last. At sunset on the fourteenth day of the eighteen day war, the battle did not end but continued throughout the following night. The next morning at sunrise the heroes had to desist from combat to offer worship to the rising sun (*ādityam upatasthire* 7.162.1). Since this pause did not mean the end of combat, the unfinished duels were resumed by the respective combatants (*dvndvāni yāni tatrāsan saṁsaktāni purodayāt/ tāny evābhyudite sūrye samasajjanta bhārata* 7.162.1-3). There are no reports of unfinished duels of the previous day being resumed if they ended at sunset. Sunset signalled the end of battle and the warriors initiated new duels the following day.

This little digression on the way the duels ended was to show that in many duels the main objective does not appear to have been to end the opponent's life, but to defeat him otherwise. In these attempts, the fighters often had to change their weapons resulting in unequal combat.

---

[5] As an aside it may be observed that Droṇa and Karṇa never adopted this means during the tenure of their generalship.

Frequently, two warriors, seated in their chariots, began combat by shooting arrows – conflict between equals in every respect. On many occasions one of the two combatants succeeded in breaking his opponent's bows in succession. In such an eventuality, the one left without bows usually drew his sword and shield and descended from his chariot. Ideally, his oponent should have acted likewise. But in most cases, the one with the upper hand used his arrows to disarm the opponent of sword and shield. The disarmed warrior then resorted to wielding other weapons like a *gadā,* a *śakti,* a *prāsa,* a chariot wheel or whatever came handy. The opponent then disarmed him of these weapons as well. The duel finally ended when the defeated warrior withdrew from combat.

These incidents could be described as violations of the rule of the fight between equals. Although it was not specifically agreed upon that the warriors should be evenly matched in weaponry, this was implied. However, no one ever blamed his opponent for such violations or even pointed out these acts of *adharma* to him. It is noteworthy that the advantageously positioned warrior who continued use of the bow and arrow against his unevenly matched opponent, never actually slew his adversary. The archer merely disarmed his unevenly matched enemy.

But there were two exceptions to the above: (1) when Aśvatthāman decapitated Nala who was armed with a sword (7.30.25), and (2) when Bhīma decapitated Śrutarvan, one of the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, in a similar situation (9.25.27).

(iii) A third meaning of "war between equals" was that one should challenge an opponent equal in age, knowledge, skill, and experience.

This merely meant that a warrior of great prowess should not challenge his inferior. This rule seems to have been scrupulously adhered to by both parties. Hence, there is no instance of a Bhīṣma or Droṇa challenging a Nakula or a Sahadeva. Similarly an Arjuna or a Bhīma did not challenge the sons of Duryodhana and Duḥśāsana to duels.

But if the inferiors went out of their way to issue challenges to their superiors, the latter had no choice but to engage them in battle. Thus we see Nakula and Yudhiṣṭhira challenging Karṇa and subsequently being humiliated. With respect to this, Karṇa felt compelled to advise Nakula to fight in future only with his equals (*sadṛśais tāta yudhyasva* 8.17.94). He advised Yudhiṣṭhira to desist from battle altogether adding that should he still choose to fight,he (Yudhiṣṭhira) should not engage major heroes in duels; and if he still did so, he should not abuse them (*mā sma yudhyasva kaunteya, mā ca vīrān samāsadaḥ/mā cainān apriyaṁ brūhi* 8.33.39).

It must, however, be immediately noted that the strict observance of the rule of the fight between equals applies only to the duels between the principal heroes. As for the battles of the principal heroes against ordinary soldiers, the rule was, unfortunately, not observed at all – the violators being on both sides.

Bhīṣma had promised Duryodhana at the war's outset that he would kill ten thousand Kṣatriyas of the Pāṇḍava army every day (6.105.25; 6.113.20). He was able to fulfil this undertaking due to a specific *vidyā*, the 'destroyer of the army of the enemy' (*parānīkavināśinī* 6.113.19,20,23), he had received from his teacher Paraśurāma. Ten thousand Kṣatriyas could by no means be considered Bhīṣma's equals. In point of fact, they were far inferior in every respect. The question arises in what way did Bhīṣma glorify himself by this act of mass killings? He provided the answer himself on the tenth day stating that he had become extremely weary of life due to these killings (*nirviṇṇo 'smi bhṛśam tāta dehenānena bhārata/ ghnataś ca me gataḥ kālaḥ subahūn prāṇino raṇe* 6.111.14,10).

Droṇa acted likewise at one instance (6.85.22). Enraged at the reported death of his son Aśvatthāman, he killed with the *brahmāstra* twenty thousand Pāñcala soldiers at one stroke (7.164.79, 83).

The Pāṇḍavas were also guilty of massacres. Bhīma (6.85.24) and Arjuna (6.112.111 ff.; 7.120.32 ff.) killed a large number of Kaurava soldiers. Sahadeva is reported to have killed the Kaurava soldiers as one would kill ants (8.17.46-47).

These violations of the rule by many heroes on both sides, like Bhīṣma, Arjuna and others, are a disgrace to their fair names. Most surprisingly no one has ever blamed them for these acts (except for Droṇa, who was blamed by some sages like Viśvāmitra for using the *brahmāstra* 7.164.89-91).

4. The next rule (*dharma*) is important as it stipulates the conditions under which a person, although armed, shall not be killed on the battlefield.

(i) The first category of such persons comprises those who felt quite confident that they will not be attacked (*viśvastaḥ*). These persons were the following:

In the first instance, those who, while fighting the war, temporarily ceased combat and became spectators. There are many such incidents in which the warriors ceased combat to watch an 'interesting' duel. Reference to 'interesting' duels is found in expressions like 'a war causing delight to spectators' (*yuddham īkṣitṛprītijananam* 6.43.54; 6.112.7) or 'delightful to look at' (*yuddhaṁ madhuradarśnam* 7.19.33). Such expressions are indicative of the phenomena of some combatants becoming spectators. It is also said, for instance, that when Droṇa and Arjuna were engaged in a duel, the warriors on both the sides ceased combat to watch this 'fascinating' conflict, the like of which was never seen before, between teacher and pupil (*mohayantau manuṣyāṇām cakṣūṁṣi ca manāṁsi ca//... upāramanta te sarve yodhāsmākaṁ pare tathā/ adṛṣṭapūrvaṁ paśyantas tad yuddhaṁ guruśiṣyayoḥ//* 7.163.22, 23).[6]

This *dharma* was carefully observed by all and there is no report of a *viśvasta* having been slain on the battlefield.

This writer has a feeling that there was also another category of *viśvastas*. It is possible to believe that all warriors, major or minor, once they reached the battlefield at sunrise, did not fight incessantly without rest till evening. It is possible to imagine that all of them, after taking part in some duels, rested for a while on the battlefield. Although there are no specific reports of this nature for the most part, we have one definite instance of a warrior retiring from the battlefield to rest. The 'Karṇa-parvan' tells us, that Yudhiṣṭhira retired from the battle and went back to his camp (8.45.57-59). It is very likely that not all the warriors returned to their respective camps, for rest, but just moved away from the battle and shortly rested on the battlefield itself. Such warriors must also have been counted among the *viśvastas,* and thus were not to be attacked.

---

[6] Also cf 7.73.21 (Droṇa against Sātyaki), 7.114.32 (Karṇa against Bhīma).

The one glaring transgression of this rule, which shall also be referred to in the next chapter, occurred not on the battlefield but in the camp; not when the war was in progress but when every fighter, convinced that the the war had ended and no attack was likely, was fast asleep. This, of course, is a reference to the unscrupulous killings carried out by Aśvatthāman and his two accomplices, Kṛpācārya and Kṛtavaraman, on the night of the eighteenth day of the war. Thus the three violated the *dharma* that the *viśvasta*, i.e. one who felt perfectly certain that he would not be attacked, should not be killed. In this act, various other rules, such as not to strike one unchallenged, one without arms, one without armour, and one fearful and fleeing for life, were violated.

(ii) The second clause of the above rule refers to a *vihvala.* It stated that one who was in a swoon, or one who felt dizzy due to a severe blow of the weapon, should not be attacked.

This clause was scrupulously adhered to and there is no instance of a warrior who had fainted being killed. As noted, such warriors were usually removed from the battle by their respective charioteers (e.g. 8.17.45; 8.34.41; 9.27.15), or other warriors on their respective sides (e.g. 6.112.25-26). However, there was one violation: Śikhaṇḍin had swooned but Kṛpācaāya continued shooting arrows at him. Nevertheless, the expression used, *jighāṁsann iva* (7.144.25-26) indicates that Kṛpācārya did not really intend to kill Śikhaṇḍin, but merely harass him.

(iii) There is no instance of the violation of the third clause which stipulated that no one who was inattentative (*pramatta*) should be attacked.

(iv) The fourth clause stipulated that a warrior should not attack another already engaged in a duel.

This clause was observed, sometimes even in trying circumstances, by warriors on both sides. But it was also violated by them on many occasions. No one, however, took exception to such violations, apprently considered negligible.

To mention a few examples of the observance of the rule by the side of the Kauravas, it may be noted that Bhīma killed Satyasena, son of Karṇa, while Satyasena was acting as Karṇa's wheel-guard (*cakrarakṣaka* 8.32.40,49). Karṇa, however, did not intervene to save his son.[7] Only after Satyasensa's death did Karṇa initiate combat with Bhīma 8.32.35). Similarly, Abhimanyu killed Lakṣamaṇa, son of Duryodhana, who was in the vicinity (*pituḥ samīpe tiṣṭhantam* 7.45.11). Like Karṇa, Duryodhana did not interefere to protect his son.

From among similar instances on the side of the Pāṇḍavas, it may be mentioned that Sātyaki did not intervene during the killing of his ten sons in quick succession by Bhūriśravas. He began combat with Bhūriśravas only when his tenth son fell (6.7.11-25). When Uttara, son of Virāṭa, was killed by Śalya, Uttara's brother, Śaṅkha, was in proximity. But he attacked Śalya only after his brother's death (6.45.35-44).

These examples notwithstanding, there were many cases of violations as well. Heroes on both sides, when in distress, were saved by their comrades-in-arms, e.g. Duryodhana, while fighting with Bhīma, was rescued by a Mleccha king (7.25.16). Śalya too was so saved (6.45.47).

There was yet another way used to violate this rule. Therein, the intervening warrior did not fully take up the duel himself but only did the necessary to remove the immediate danger to his partisan's life. Thus, when Arjuna struck Duryodhana with arrows, fortified with the utterance of the *mantras* and thereby sure to fatally pierce his armour, Aśvatthāman intervened to cut off those missiles (7.78.21-22; also 8.21.20). Similarly, when Karṇa dispatched a deadly arrow (*mṛtyudaṇḍam ivāparam*), against Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Sātyaki cut it off (8.42.13; also 7.72.31, where the arrow was shot by Droṇa).

There was, however, one serious violation of this rule of non-intervention, the transgression resulting in loud protest.

---

[7] But when Bhīma was about to kill another son of Karṇa, Suṣeṇa, who was also acting as his chariot-guard Karṇa intervened to cut off two arrows shot at Suṣeṇa by Bhīma (8.32.40, 53-54).

Surprisingly, the violator was Arjuna, the most accalaimed warrior of the epic war. The violation occurred during a duel between two Yādavas – Bhūriśravas of the Kaurava army and Sātyaki of the Pāṇḍava army. During the duel the combatants discarded their weapons and were engaged in a wrestling bout. Sātyaki lost, and Bhūriśravas was about to sever his head with a sword, when Arjuna severed Bhūriśravas' swordhand from a distance. This went far beyond the permissible limits of intervention. It would have been sufficient for Arjuna to disarm Bhūriśravas; he should not have severed the hand itself. This particular transgression was twofold as it also violated the rule that the opponent was not to be taken unawares. Arjuna did not challenge Bhūriśravas and was, in fact, unseen. Arjuna attacked Bhūriśravas from the rear. Arjuna crippled Bhūriśravas, rendering him incapable of further combat. (*hṛto bāhur adṛśyena kirīṭinā* 7.118.2; *apaśyato viṣaktasya yan me bāhur acicchidaḥ* 7.118.4). There is no other violation as serious as this. With respect to this violation it has to be observed that: first, Arjuna should not have intervened; next, having done so, he should have done no more than what was permissible as a general practice; and finally such permissible intervention should not have taken place from the opponent's backside.

It is not at all surprising that Bhūriśravas condemned Arjuna. He described Arjuna's act as *nṛśaṁsa* (wicked), *nīcacarita* (performed by a very low person),[8] *asatpuruṣasevita* (committed by an unrighteous person), and *anāryakarma* (act of one who was not an *ārya* or noble) 7.118.4, 9,10. He asked Arjuna tauntingly from whom he had learnt this 'missile' – from Kṛṣṇa, from Droṇa, from Indra, or from Rudra (7.118.6).

One is reminded here of the way Rāma attacked and killed Vālin. Rāma too shot the deadly arrow when Vālin was engaged in a duel with Sugrīva. Like Arjuna Rāma was also unseen by his target. Naturally Rāma earned severe condemnation from Vālin (Rāmāyaṇa 4.17.18, 48, 52).

It is surprising that while we often hear of the heroes like Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa, and Duryodhana having been unlawfully killed by the Pāṇḍavas, there is hardly any reference to Arjuna's unlawful attack on Bhūriśravas (who was subsequently unlawfully killed by Sātyaki). These acts were performed in flagrant violation of the rules of the war.

---

[8] In the view of Somadatta too, Arjuṇa's act was not according to the *dharma* of a Kṣatriya, but an act (*dharma*) of a *dasyu* (robber) 7.118.12; 7.131.2.

(v) Clause five of the agreement laid down that one should not attack a hero who was without arms or armour.

A *nirāyudha* warrior, that is a weaponless warrior, was one whose weapons had been destroyed by his opponent. A warrior was not considered weaponless if he was disarmed of only bow, sword, or mace. As already noted, if a warrior was rendered weaponless, he was looked upon as having been defeated. Such warriors usually left the battles themselves or were removed from the scene by their partisans (8.32.66). This rule was carefully observed by both parties but, technically speaking, there was an apparent violation of this rule, assumed to have been committed by Yudhiṣṭhira, the 'Dharmarāja'. In conflict with Śalya, Yudhiṣṭhira disarmed him of bow, sword, etc. Śalya even lost his horses and his charioteer. Weaponless, Śalya, famed for the strength of his arms, rushed at Yudhiṣṭhira to challenge him to a wrestling bout. Thus Śalya had not ceased to fight and had not accepted defeat. At this juncture, Yudhiṣṭhira, who did not consider himself a match for his adversary as a wrestler, hurled his *śakti* at him. Śalya, though strong, was not strong enough to catch and break the *śakti* and consequently died (9.16.40,42,49,51). This particular instance cannot be viewed as a violation of the rule not to attack a *nirāyudha*, because Śalya wished to continue the fight with the strength of his arms as his weapon.[9]

The condition 'a warrior without armour', meant 'a warrior who had not donned his armour and was not ready to fight'. There is no instance of this rule being violated on the battlefield. As a major example of compliance with this rule, Duryodhana, who was without armour, was given time to don it for his final duel with Bhīma (9.31.12, 50, 52,54,55). This rule, however, apparently did not protect the warriors who lost their armour in combat on the battlefield. In such cases, the attacks continued. There are no instances of warriors donning fresh armour when the one they wore at the start of the battle was destroyed by their opponents.

---

[9] At the most this could be looked upon as an instance of combat with unequal weapons. For the use of arms as weapon cf. the expression *bāhuśastrau* 2.21.10.

(v) The sixth and the last rule was related to not killing a warrior fleeing from the battlefield.

This rule was observed without exception by the major heroes. When Śikhaṇḍin fled while fighting with Karṇa, the latter did not pursue and kill him (8.44.23), and there are many examples of this type. Arjuna did not kill Bhagadatta and his elephant when the elephant turned away. He remembered the *dharma* that was decided upon: not to kill anyone who showed his back (*....neyeṣa parāvṛttaṁ mahādvipam / sarohaṁ mṛtyusātkartuṁ smaran dharmaṁ dhanaṁjayayḥ* 7.27.29).

On many occasions before the start of a duel, when the challenge was issued by a warrior to his chosen opponent, the challenger said: "I shall kill you today if you do not leave the battlefield." This is, for example, what Bhīma said to Duryodhana : *adya tvām nihniṣyāmi yadi notsṛjase raṇam* (6.75.3). A warrior, if he fled, was not taken captive. Droṇa assured Duryodhana of fulfilment of his wish to capture Yudhiṣṭhira if the latter did not flee from the battle (*yadi notsrṛjate raṇam gṛhītam iti viddhi tam* 7.16.8). Arjuna had to leave Yudhiṣṭhira when he was challenged for a fight by the Saṁśaptakas. Before leaving, Arjuna assigned Satyajit Pāñcālya the duty of protecting Yudhiṣṭhira, and advised Yudhiṣṭhira to flee with others in case Satyajit was killed, obviously to avoid being killed or captured by Droṇa (*hate tu puruṣavyāghre raṇe satyajiti prabho / sarvair api sametair vā na sthātavyaṁ kathaṁcana* 7.16.45).

Unfortunately this rule was transgressed by the heroes with respect to ordinary soldiers, towards whom it should have been scrupulously observed. Hence we see Karṇa slaying the ordinary soldiers of the Pāṇḍava-Pāñcāla army, even after it was routed, by shooting arrows from behind their backs (*tān prabhagnān drutān karṇaḥ pṛṣṭhato vikiran charaiḥ/ abhyadhāvata tejasvī...* 8.17.119).[10] Bhīma did the same (*tatas tāṁ kauravīṁ senāṁ dravamāṇāṁ samantataḥ / nighnan bhīmaḥ śarais tīkṣṇair anuvavrāja pṛṣṭhataḥ* 7.147.2).

---

[10] On a different occasion Droṇa had joined Karṇa in doing the same 7.147.21 (*dravamāṇaṁ tu tat sainyaṁ droṇakarṇau mahārathau / jaghnatuḥ pṛṣṭhato rājan*).

Major heroes on both sides were guilty of this reprehensible violation of a *yuddhadharma*.

Arjuna, however, was an exception. He did not strike the soldiers from the rear, this being against the vow taken by a warrior (*parāṅmukhān / na jaghānārjuno yodhān yuddhavratam anusmaran* 7.31.48).

5. The fifth and the last *dharma* stipulated that certain persons present on the battlefield but not holding weapons and not taking direct part in the conflict, should not be killed. Three such categories have been specifically mentioned: those who were engaged in supplying arms to the warriors; those who were present to encourage the warriors by sounding certain instruments like *bherī,* conch, etc.; and, finally, the charioteers (and horses).

(i) Suppliers-of-arms: A chariot-fighter was armed with a limited number of bows, arrows and other weapons. Elephant-riders, cavalrymen, and infantrymen's weapons were limited even further. Hence persons, i.e. suppliers-of-arms, were employed to supply the warriors with arms whenever they fell short. The persons thus engaged were not to be killed.

This part of the rule was observed without violation; it may seem absurd today as in modern warfare it is considered essential to cut off the enemy's supply-line. Obviously, considerations and war-strategies were markedly different in epic times, and supply of fresh arms was not supposed to be interrupted or thwarted.

(ii) Sounders of conches, etc: These sounded their instruments either to encourage the warriors on their respective sides to fight vigorously, or express their joy when some heroic act was performed by a warrior of their respective sides. They no doubt contributed to the war effort but being unarmed and not actual combatants, were looked as unfit targets. This part of the rule was also observed without exception.

(iii) The third catrgory was that of the charioteers and horses: *na sūteṣu na dhuryeṣu prahartavyaṁ kathaṁcana* (6.1.32). Unfortunately, however, these were never spared

It is extremely sad to observe that this particular rule, although specifically agreed to by both sides on the night before the war, was thoughtlessly violated by *leaders on both sides* right from the very first day of the conflict. Even worse, there is not a word of regret or condemnation in the epic, or anywhere else in our tradition, for such a reprehensible violation.

A charioteer was unarmed. His hands were engaged in controlling and guiding the horses. He was, therefore, unable to defend himself. Killing the opponent's charioteer or horses was an act of cowardice. Offering protection to the charioteer, while protecting oneself, was the paramount duty of the warrior. The charioteer was his master's other self. But ignoring this, the principal heroes on both the sides -from Bhīṣma to Sahadeva – employed this easy method of inflicting defeat on the opponent. On the very first day of the war, Abhimanyu and Bṛhadbala, the Kosala king, killed each other's charioteers (*sārathi* or *pārṣṇi-sārathi*). Thenceforth, on all the succeeding days, many charioteers and horses were killed by warriors on both sides, not realizing that they were committing reprehensible acts. The only two charioteers who escaped death were Kṛṣṇa[11] and Śalya. Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna's charioteer throughout the eighteen day war, and Śalya, Karṇa's charioteer for only a day, remained alive.

(iv) There is one more class of persons present on the battle-field, viz, that of the *vātikas*, or the war-reporters. Duryodhana asked the *vātikas* to report his fall to Aśvatthāman, Kṛtavarman and Kṛpa (9.63.28.39), and they carried out this task (9.63.42-43; 9.64.1). In the rules agreed to for the war, *vātikas* have not been specifically mentioned among those not to be attacked and killed, but this was probably taken for granted. We have already seen that Saṁjaya, the war-reporter of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, used to be present on the battlefield. There were also other reporters with him, as can be inferred from the use of the plural forms in Saṁjaya's reportings, e.g. *apaśyāma* 'we saw' (8.36.4; 8.39.7), or *na prājñāsiṣma* 'we did not know' (8.35.46). None of these reporters was killed. Saṁjaya was, no doubt, once about to be killed by Sātyaki, but he (Saṁjaya) had then ceased to be a reporter, and had actually taken up arms to take part in the war (9.28. 35-38).

6. The last *dharma* was not actually concerned with the conduct of the war in the sense that it did not, for example, state

---

[11] Kṛṣṇa was no doubt attacked by Bhīṣma on two occasions (6.48.49, 51; 6.55.59) and once by Bhagadatta,(7.27.26), but he survived the attacks.

when to begin a duel, whom to engage, the conditions under which combat was to cease and the like. It, rather, was related to the situation arsing after the war's end. This *dharma* stated that those who survived the war should entertain affection (*prīti*) for one another and should not deceive one another.

The Pāṇḍavas adhered to this rule, but the Kauravas flagrantly violated it. The violation was committeed by the trio -- Aśvatthāman, Kṛtavarman and Kṛpa. In fact, this last *dharma* should have deterred Aśvatthāman from his last action. Kṛpācārya, his maternal uncle, tried his best, but to no avail, to dissuade Aśvatthāman from carrying out his nocturanal adventure. When Aśvatthāman left to do what he desired, the other two joined him.

As for the Pāṇḍavas, with the fall of Duryodhana the war ended. Yudhiṣṭhira said: "Duryodhana has been killed, the enmity has ended" (*gataṁ vairasya nidhanam hato rājā suyodhanaḥ* (9.59.43). They, therefore, did not anticipate any attack, much less on their camp at night, and that too without warning. Their heroes and the rest of the army, delighted in victory, confidently slept in their camp. This is exactly what Aśvatthāman expected and he wanted to use their sense of security to his fullest advantage (*adya svapsyanti pāñcālā viśvastā jitakāśinaḥ / vimuktayugyakavacā harṣeṇa ca samanvitāḥ // ... teṣām niśi prasuptānāṁ svasthānāṁ śibire svake/ avaskandaṁ kariṣyāmi śibirasyādya duṣkaram* / / 10.3.25-26).

Thus for the Kauravas the situation was quite different. For them the war had not ended, and Duryodhana asked Kṛpācārya to bring some water to consecrate Aśvatthāman as the Kauravas' general. Duryodhana could not have anticipated what Aśvatthāman actually did to fulfil his vow to finish the Pāñcālas. After accepting the generalship, Aśvattāman should have engaged his opponents in battle as on the previous eighteen days. Instead, he decided in favour of nocturnal expedition and attacked the war heroes while they were asleep. When, after the first few killings, the rest of the army was roused Aśvatthāman took advantage of darkness and total unpreparedness of the opponents. In violating this last *dharma* which forbade practice of deceit, Aśvatthāman and his abettors violated all the other *dharmas*: not attacking unarmed and unprotected opponents, not attacking unequals,

२.५७८

and not attacking those fleeing and begging for life.

We have now come to the end of our examination of the observance and violation of the rules of war – the rules to which both the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas had willingly consented.

As for the scenes on the battle-field, it can now be said that some of the rules, like throwing a challenge, fighting words with words, engaging an equal in a duel, not killing the spectactors and opponents under certain conditions, were scrupulously observed by both parties.

But it becomes immediately evident that some of the above rules were not followed with regard to ordinary soldiers. These soldiers were attacked by heroes superior to them in every respect and were also killed even when fleeing for life. It must also be observed that charioteers and horses – who were not supposed to be attacked at all – were ruthlessly attacked and even killed by all the major heroes from both sides.

Off the battle-field, only Aśvatthāman, the last general of the Kauravas, and his two associates threw all the rules to the wind in a single stroke. Their celebrated predecessors would never have dreamt of acting thus. Aśvatthāman's deed is all the more surprising as he had on occasions boasted that he would kill Dhṛṣṭadyumna on the battlefield (e.g. *dhṛṣṭadyumnaṁ ca samare hantāhaṁ pāpakāriṇam* 7.166.28; 7.170.6-7).

The conclusion, therefore, can only be that from the point of view of the observance of the rules of war, the Mahābhārata war cannot be called a *dharmayuddha*, the heroes on *both* sides having to share the responsibility for this.

Before concluding, let us refer to three special cases not covered so far by this investigation of the rules of the war.

First, the case of Abhimanyu. Before he fought his last duel with the son of Duḥśāsana, he was attacked by some six warriors on the side of the Kauravas. This violated the rule: 'one against one'. This rule occurs in the list of the general rules listed by Bhīṣma for Yudhiṣṭhira.[12] The rule does not explicitly figure in the list of the contract made by the two warring sides. It was, however, implied in the rule regarding non-intervention.[13]

---

[12] See above p. 7.

[13] See above p. 8.

Abhimanyu was attacked by six heroes, not simultaneously but in succession.[14] Occasional intervention by one hero was tolerated, but multiple intervention, as in Abhimanyu's case went far beyond the tolerable limit.

The second case is that of Karṇa. When one of the wheels of his chariot stuck in a crevice, he appealed to Arjuna not to shoot an arrow at him. He reminded Arjuna of certain rules of war. Karṇa told him that a hero worth his name did not strike his adversary when the latter was in difficulty (*tathā vyasange 'rjuna ... na śūrāḥ praharanty ājau* 8.66. 62-64). We have examined above the detailed rules of the agreement reached by the two parties. They did not prevent a warrior taking advantage of his adversary's position. Karṇa made this addition to the agreed rules to cover his particular case. But he forgot that he had himself on occasions struck his opponents when they were in distress. In a duel between Karṇa and Yudhiṣṭhira, the latter lost his charioteer and his uncontrolled horses drove him hither and thither. Karṇa should have then ceased combat as Yudhiṣṭhira was in distress; instead, he pursued Yudhiṣṭhira (8.55.39-40). On a different occasion Arjuna objected to Kṛṣṇa taking the impact of and holding on his chest the *vaiṣṇavāstra* hurled by Bhagadatta. According to Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa could have intervened on his behalf on some other occasion of difficulty (*yady ahaṁ vyasanī vā syām* 7.28.20). This remark shows that Arjuna could anticipate an attack when in distress. Karṇa's involving a non-exitent rule has, therefore, no relevance.

The third case is of Duryodhana. The rules discussed so far do not deal with specific combats fought with weapons like a *gadā* or a sword. When Bhīma struck down Duryodhana he undoubtedly violated the extablished rule that in a *gadāyuddha* no one was to be struck below the navel[15] (9.59.6).

The cases of Abhimanyu and Duryodhana add to the list of violations and support the contention that the Mahābhārata war cannot be called a *dharmayuddha*, i.e. a war fought strictly in accordance with the rules agreed to by the two parties.

---

[14] See Chapter 3, pp. 59f.

[15] For details see Chapter II, pp. 46f.

CHAPTER 2

What Does *Yogeśvara* Kṛṣṇa Mean in the Gītā 18.78 (Mbh. 6.40.78)?

Some words in the Mahābhārata occurring in certain definite contexts have been misunderstood. The words *mitradroha, vāsas,* and *śaratalpagata* can be cited as examples. The word *mitradroha,* occurring in the Gītā *kulakṣayakṛtaṁ doṣaṁ mitradrohe ca pātakam* (1.38 = Mbh. 6.23.38), does not mean, as usually assumed, 'injury to a friend' or 'deceiving a friend' for the simple reason that the Kauravas had never looked upon the Pāṇḍavas as 'friends', but rather as arch-enemies. *Mitradroha* in that context, therefore means 'break of the contract', for that is precisely what Duryodhana did in refusing to return to the Pāṇḍavas their share of the kingdom. The word *vāsas,* occurring in the instruction of Karṇa to Duḥśāsana : "bring the *vāsas* of the Pāṇḍavas and also of Draupadī" (*pāṇḍavānāṃ ca vāsāṃsi draupadyāś cāpy upāhara* (2.61.38), does not mean the 'lower garment', but the 'upper garment' (*uttarīya*). And the word *śaratalpagata*, (or other synonymous expressions) used with reference to Bhīṣma lying on the battlefield (6.14.4; 6.114.85; 12.53.24, 27 etc.), does not mean 'lying on the bed of arrows (which had pierced Bhīṣma's body and were sticking)' – that would be an impossibility – but 'lying on the bed of arrows (which lay scattered on the ground)'. To prove this one needs only to point to a clear a statement in the *Mahābhārata:* the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas arranged for the fallen Bhīṣma a bed and a cushion of arrows that lay around him on the ground (7.1.16).

Such, in this writer's opinion, is also the case with regard to the word *yogeśvara,* occurring in the last stanza of the Bhagavadgītā. The placing of the stanza is important. With this final stanza the Gītā ends and the war begins. In this stanza, Saṁjaya states that in the ensuing war victory and lasting policy will be on the side where *dhanurdhara* Pārtha (Arjuna) and *yogeśvara* Kṛṣṇa are together (*yatra yogeśvaraḥ kṛṣṇo yatra pārtho dhanurdharaḥ / tatra śrīr vijayo bhūtir dhruvā nītir matir mama* 18.78 = Mbh. 6.40.78).

Now to examine the meaning of the word *yogeśvara* in this stanza. It has been taken for granted that here it means the same as at one other instance in the Gītā: 'the master of the *yogaśāstra*' (18.76). Thus S.K. Belvalkar translates the word as "the Master of the Yoga" (Eng. Tr. of the Gītā, Poona 1943), and M.R. Yardi, in his recent publication, *The Bhagavadgītā as a Synthesis* (BORI, Pune, 1981), renders it "the Lord of Yoga", that is to say "the master of the Yoga philosophy" or "the master of the technique of *yoga*".

This, however, is incorrect. In the Gītā, Arjuna has three roles to play: (1) confused whether he should fight, laying down the arms and becoming a pupil (*śiṣya*); (2) a devotee (*bhakta*) desirous to see the *viśvarūpa* of the God; and (3) a hero (*dhanurdhara)* picking up his bow again and ready to fight. Correspondingly, Kṛṣṇa also plays three roles in the Gītā: (1) The teacher teaching the *yogaśāstra* to his pupil Arjuna; (2) the God (*viśveśvara, viśvamūrti*) manifesting his wonderful form to his devotee Arjuna; and (3) the charioteer ready to guide the horses of the hero Arjuna.

The word *yogeśvara* also occurs thrice in the Gītā, in the three contexts.

Once it occurs with reference to the teacher Kṛṣṇa teaching the *yogaśāstra* to Arjuna (*yogaṁ yogeśvarāt kṛṣṇāt sākṣāt kathayataḥ svayam* 18.76). Quite clearly, here *yogeśvara* means 'the master of, or one who is proficient in, the *yogaśāstra*', for Kṛṣṇa has taught various *yogas* like *jñānayoga, karmayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* to Arjuna.[1]

The word *yogeśvara* occurs a second time in the Gītā with reference to god Kṛṣṇa manifesting (to Arjuna) the grand spectacle of his universal form (*mahāyogeśvaro hariḥ / darśayām āsa pārthāya paramaṁ rūpam aiśvaram* 11.9; also 11.4). In this context, *yogeśvara* quite clearly means 'one who is the master of the great power' – with which he could show the grand *viśvarūpa* to Arjuna.[2]

---

[1] This meaning is not suited to the word *yogeśvara* as occurring in the Gītā 18.78 because there the *yogeśvara* Kṛṣṇa is said to be surely leading Arjuna to victory and prosperity (*vijaya, śri bhūti*), while the Yogeśvara, as the teacher of the Yogaśāstra, asks Arjuna to be indifferent to victory and defeat, profit and loss, etc. (Gītā 2.38).

Both these meanings, suitable in their respective contexts where Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna figure either as teacher and pupil, or God and devotee, are unsuitable for the third context where the two appear as charioteer and warrior. Significantly, in the first two contexts where Arjuna's role is subordinate, his name does not appear with Kṛṣṇa's. In the third context, however, the warrior Arjuna figures by the side of Kṛṣṇa and is given the appropriate epithet: *dhanurdhara,* 'the wielder of the bow'. The charioteer, Kṛṣṇa, is given the epithet *yogeśvara,* the meaning of which has to be one suiting a charioteer. A charioteer is not expected to be a master of the *yogaśāstra.* Nor is he expected to be endowed with the supernatural power to manifest the *viśvarūpa.*

In order, therefore, to arrive at the meaning of *yogeśvara* as suiting a charioteer, it is initially essential to have some idea of a charioteer's functions on the battlefield as well as of his relation with his chariot. A charioteer did not just drive the horses as demanded by the warrior. An ideal charioteer performed many other functions as well. Some idea of these can be formed by closely examining some incidents of the war.

1. A charioteer made the chariot swiftly swerve to prevent the opponent's missiles from striking the warrior. Kṛṣṇa did so to dodge Bhīṣma's arrows which were targeted at Arjuna. While doing so Kṛṣṇa displayed his expertise in driving horses (*adarśayad vāsudevo hayayāne parāṁ balam / moghaṁ kurvan śarāṁs tasya (= bhīṣmasya) maṇḍalāny acaral laghu* 6.55.58). Kṛṣṇa also quickly veered the chariot around to frustrate

---

[2] In the *sabhā* of the Kauravas, Kṛṣṇa showed something similar to the Viśvarūpa. It is said that Kṛṣṇa's act there was the manifestsation of his power as a Yogeśvara (*yogeśvaratvam kṛṣṇena yatra rājasu darśtiam* 1.2.147). This second meaning of *yogeśvara* is not suited for the Gītā 18.78 because the Yogeśvara Kṛṣṇa of the Gītā 11.9 told Arjuna that Bhīṣma, Droṇa and the rest were already killed by him and that Arjuna had only to be an instrument (*nimitta)* of Kṛṣṇa. But in the Gītā 18.78, Arjuna is not assigned a subordinate role. There, the participation of both Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna was deemed to be equally necesary to win the war.

Bhagadatta's attempt to kill Arjuna by charging his elephant on him (*tam āpatantam dviradaṁ dṛṣṭvā kruddham ivāntakam / cakre 'pasavyaṁ tvaritaḥ syandanena janārdanaḥ* 7.27.28).

2. A charioteer advised the warrior to correct the arrow's aim if he (the charioteer) felt that it was inaccurate. This is what Śalya did when he asked Karṇa to adjust his aim – as Karṇa's arrow at that point would not have hit Arjuna's neck (*tam* (=*karṇam*) *abravīn madrarājo . . . na karṇa grīvāṁ iṣur eṣa prāpsyate* 8.66.7).

3. A charioteer might even receive on his own person a missile hurled at the fighter if he felt that the latter would be unable to manage it. When Bhagadatta turned a goad into *vaiṣṇavsāstra* and hurled it at Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa promptly intervenued and received it on his chest (7.28.16-20, 29) to save the hero.

4. A charioteer drew the warrior's attention to action elsewhere on the battlefield. When Sātyaki was over-whelmed by Bhūriśravas and his life was in danger, Kṛṣṇa drew Arjuna's attention to Sātyaki's plight (7.117.55-56), which led to Arjuna's intervention to save Sātyaki.

5. He encouraged and incited the warrior to fight with greater vigour if the latter was indifferent or below the mark while combating his adversary. This is what Kṛṣṇa did on an occasion when Aśvatthāman had an edge over Arjuna (8.40.121-124).

Such were some of the tasks of a skilled charioteer during the war. These have not been specifically listed in the Mahābhārata as a charioteer's functions,[3] but can be inferred on the basis of the incidents just referred to.

As regards a charioteer's relation with his chariot, it has to be observed that he took as perfect care of it as a householder would of the family (*rathasya kuṭumbin* 8.28.8). Everyday he mounted the chariot first, the fighter following him (8.26.11). If the chariot was about to be destroyed during combat by the opponent, the warrior jumped off and saved his life. But the charioteer, like the dutiful captain of a sinking ship, remained firm in his seat and went down with the chariot. The epic war bristles with instances of fighters who saved their lives by abandoning their chariots in time (e.g. 7.153. 13-15 where Ghaṭotkaca jumped out; 9.19.16-17 where Dhṛṣṭadyumna did the same). But there is not a single instance in the entire epic which relates that a charioteer followed suit. It is unfortunate that this supreme sacrifice has failed to evoke the interest of our poets, the charioteers' heroism remaining unsung.

---

[3] On one occasion Śalya told Karṇa what a charioteer ought to discern: the opponent's strength and weaknesses, equalities and inequalities among the fighters, whether the fighter or his horses were fatigued, and other like matters (8.28. 6-8). A listing is found also in the Rāmāyaṇa (cf. 6.93.15ff) reference to which will be made in the next chapter, p. 72).

As already pointed out in some of the above examples, Kṛṣṇa, as a chrioteer, had saved Arjuna from dangerous situations many a time. He also saved almost the entire army of the Pāṇḍavas on certain occasions. Kṛṣṇa, the charioteer, has used the word *yoga* in the sense of an 'expedient means, a stratagem' to be employed in war to overcome a difficult situation. When Droṇa started massacring the Pāñcāla soldiers, the Pāṇḍavas found it difficult to contain him. They even lost hope of winning the war (*nāśaṁsur vijayaṁ tadā* 7.164.63). Kṛṣṇa's reaction was to plainly tell Arjuna that it was impossible to defeat Droṇa in a straight fight (*naiṣa yuddhena saṁgrāme jetuṁ śakyaḥ kathaṁcana* 7.164.67). Hence it was necessary to employ some *yoga*, i.e. some strategy, to defeat Droṇa. He told Arjuna: "Take recourse to *yoga* for winning victory" (*āsthīyatāṁ jaye yogaḥ* 7.164.68).

We have so far stressed three points: (1) that it was the duty of a charioteer to use certain means in the interest of the warrior and of his side; (2) that in these contexts, the word *yoga* meant 'a stratagem, an expedient means'; (3) that in the context of the line *yatra yogeśvaraḥ kṛṣṇaḥ,* Kṛṣṇa was not playing the role of a teacher or god, but of a charioteer. The conclusion, therefore, seems inescapable that *yogeśvara* in the last stanza of the Gītā means 'the *īśvara*, i.e. the master of stratagem, master of the expedient means of warfare'. This is why Saṁjaya told Dhṛtarāṣṭra that victory will be on the side where *yogeśvara* Kṛṣṇa and *dhanurdhara* Pārtha (Arjuna) come together.

Now to examine the war incidents where Kṛṣṇa suggested some *yogas* to Arjuna (or to the Pāṇḍavas) which entitle him the *yogeśvara.*

1. The Fall of Bhīṣma: It is possible to assert that Kṛṣṇa had no role in the fall of Bhīṣma. He had suggested no *yoga* to eliminate the first Kaurava general. It is, of course, true that on the night of

the ninth day of the war Yudhiṣṭhira lost hopes of defeating Bhīṣma and began talking of abandoning the war and retiring to the forest. Kṛṣṇa responded with encouragement, even stating that if Yudhiṣṭhira requested, he was prepared to take up arms and kill Bhīṣma (*māṁ vā niyuṁkṣva...haniṣyāmi raṇe bhīṣmam* 6.103.28-29). For this Kṛṣṇa also needed Arjuna's permission (6.103.43), since the warrior had vowed to effect Bhīṣma's downfall (*ghātayiṣyāmi gāṁgeyam* 6.103.35). But Yudhiṣṭhira did not permit Kṛṣṇa to eliminate the Kaurava Commander-in-Chief, instead of aiding the Pāṇḍavas without recourse to arms, this being what the *yogeśvara* had already agreed to (6.103.43).[4]

Who, then, brought about the downfall of Bhīṣma ? Certain statements attribute this to Arjuna (*pātayām āsa kaunteyaḥ* 6.15.10, 63; 7.3.2), but others credit Śikhaṇḍin with this feat (*śikhaṇḍinā nihataḥ* 6.14.5, 7; 6.15.1; 7.125.11; 7.126.7). The truth seems to lie in the statement that both Arjuna and Śikhaṇḍin played a part. Śikhaṇḍin, protected by Arjuna, felled Bhīṣma (*pālyamānaḥ kirīṭinā śikhaṇḍy avadhīd bhīṣmam* 7.126.7). Duryodhana had expected this. He had repeatedly warned his brother Duḥśāsana that the Pāṇḍavas would attempt to single out Bhīṣma from the rest of the Kauravas and then Śikhaṇḍin, protected by Arjuna, would attempt to kill the general. Hence Duḥśasana's prime duty was to protect Bhīṣma and frustrate the Pāṇḍavas' plan (*sa* (*i.e. śikhaṇḍī*) *rakṣyamāṇaḥ pārthena tathāsmābhir vivarjitaḥ / yathā bhīṣmaṁ na no hanyād duḥśāsana tathā kuru* 6.95.22; 6.16.20).

Who suggested this plan to the Pāṇḍavas? Certainly not Kṛṣṇa. At no instance does the Mahābhārata even indicate, even by a hint, that Kṛṣṇa was the mastermind who conceived of Arjuna and Śikhaṇḍin jointly carrying out this task. According to the Mahābhārata, Bhīṣma himself suggested this plan to Yudhiṣṭhira (6.103.68, 77, 79-81). But this is absurd, and the passage's authenticity is doubtful, although found in all versions of the epic. The correct answer to the above is that Arjuna suggested the plan to Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the commander of the Pāṇḍava forces. He

---

[4] Earlier, on two occasions Kṛṣṇa did rush at Bhīṣma, once with his *sudarśana cakra* and the second time with his goad (*pratoda*). But this was only to incite Arjuna to fight with Bhīṣma more earnestly. It had no other purpose to serve.

DISTRICT LIBRARY
SRINAGAR.

asked Dhṛṣṭadyumna to manoeuvre the army in a way whereby Śikhaṇḍin, while protected by Arjuna, could confront Bhīṣma (*śikhaṇḍinaṁ naravyāghra bhīṣmasya pramukhe 'nagha/ sthāpayasvādya pāñcālya tasya goptāham apy uta* 6.95.25).[5] There was nothing immoral in this suggestion since even prominent heroes had their side-guards (*cakrarakṣaka* 'wheel-guard') and rear-guards (*pṛṣṭhagopa*).

This brings up a vital question: if it was common knowledge that Bhīṣma would not strike Śikhaṇḍin since he was a woman turned man (6.103.73; 5. 193.62), why the necessity of protecting him while he combated Bhīṣma ?

To answer this we have to understand certain occurrences on the battlefield as well as the full significance of Bhīṣma's vow not to strike at Śikhaṇḍin (*pāñcālyaṁ tu mahābāho nāhaṁ hanyāṁ śikhaṇḍinam / udyateṣum abhiprekṣya pratiyudhayantam āhave* 5.169.16, 21; 5. 193. 61, 63-65; 5.194.64). From the description of what actually took place in the duel between Bhīṣma and Śikhaṇḍin, it becomes evident that Bhīṣma's vow actually meant that he would not directly employ any missile or weapon to kill Śikhaṇḍin. This vow did not prevent him from disarming Śikhaṇḍin of all his missiles and weapons. There is an account which informs us that Yudhiṣṭhira spoke harsh words to Śikhaṇḍin when he was disarmed by Bhīṣma (*chinnāyudhaṁ śāntanavena rājā* (i.e. Yudhiṣṭhira) *śikhaṇḍinam prekṣya ca jātakopaḥ* 6.81.17). Thus this means that Bhīṣma did shoot arrows to disarm Śikhaṇḍin of his *āyudhas*. Hence Arjuna was needed to protect Śikhaṇḍin, i.e. specifically to prevent him from being disarmed by Bhīṣma. Secondly, Śikhaṇḍin also had to be protected from other Kaurava warriors. Although duels were normally fought by two individuals, interventions, both major and minor, by partisans on either side, often took place. Śikhaṇḍin needed Arjuna's protection from these potential dangers. Arjuna did his duty exceptionally well. He disarmed Bhīṣma of his bows one after the other, thereby preventing him from disarming Śikhaṇḍin

---

[5] While acting as Śikhaṇḍin's protector, Arjuna is also seen on occasions inciting him to attack and kill Bhīṣma (*śikhaṇḍinaṁ ca kaunteyo yāhi yāhīty acodayat / bhīṣmaṁ prati mahārāja jahy enam iti cābravīt* 6.112. 58, 81, 83; 6.104. 49-53; 6.106.1-2).

(6.114.13, 24-26, 48, 49). When Bhīṣma was about to step off the chariot with sword and shield, Arjuna deprived him of these as well (6.114.81). Bhīṣma was thus made easy prey for Śikhaṇḍin. So Bhīṣma's fall was planned by Arjuna and executed in collaboration with Śikhaṇḍin, Kṛṣṇa having no hand in it.

2. The Fall of Droṇa: Kṛṣṇa did have a hand in bringing about Droṇa's demise. But one must be crystal clear in understanding the extent to which he shared this responsibility.

We have already seen that when Droṇa began mass scale killings of the Pāñcālas, Kṛṣṇa pleaded with Arjuna that the Pāṇḍavas would have to adopt some *yoga* to overcome Droṇa. The danger the Pāñcālas and, in fact, the whole Pāṇḍava army faced was so colossal that an expendient measure, involving even some departure from strict adherence to moral conduct, was necessary. Kṛṣṇa, therefore told Arjuna: *āsthīyatāṁ jaye yogo dharmam utsṛjya pāṇḍava* (7. 164. 68) "Take recourse to a stratagem for victory, (even) setting aside *dharma*". As is well known, the *yoga* suggested by the *yogeśvara* Kṛṣṇa was that someone should declare within earshot of Droṇa the news of the death of his son Aśvatthāman. Kṛṣṇa's calculation was that the sad news of his son's death would induce Droṇa to desist from fighting (*aśvatthāmni hate naiṣa yudhyed iti matir mama / taṁ* (i.e. *aśvatthāmānaṁ*) *hataṁ saṁyuge kaścid asmai śaṁsatu mānavaḥ* 7.164.69).

This statement makes certain points of Kṛṣṇa's *yoga* clear. In the first instance, he did not suggest that a major hero, much less a Pāṇḍava,[6] falsely proclaim Aśvatthāman's death. Any person (*mānavaḥ*), e.g. any ordinary soldier or even a reporter (*vātika*), would satisfy this purpose. Secondly, he did not suggest the killing of an elephant of that name before the false announcement. And finally – especially important – he did not suggest that Droṇa should be killed when he ceased fighting. Kṛṣṇa's aim clearly was to end the immediate danger confronting the Pāṇḍava army by somehow compelling Droṇa to retire from battle for the remainder of the day. It was shown in the last chapter that many heroes, for one reason or the other, temporarily ceased from fighting (*vimukha*). They were not to be attacked on such occasions. The *yoga* suggested by Kṛṣṇa was not favoured by Arjuna. Yudhiṣṭhira consented after some persuasion. The others responded enthusiastically.

---

[6] He does not say, e.g., *asmi śaṁsatu pāṇḍavaḥ* in 7.164.69, but says *asmi śaṁsatu mānavaḥ*.

Bhīma, apparently, rapidly turned over the proposition, and came up with the brilliant idea to partly mitigage the *adharma* in Kṛṣṇa's suggested *yoga* by killing an elephant named Aśvatthāman. He also took upon himself the responsibility of making the announcement of Aśvatthāman's death clearly to give it some weight. He knew that king Indravaraman of the Mālava country, an ally of the Pāṇḍavas, had an elephant named Aśvatthāman (7.164.101, 71). So he killed the elephant immediately and proclaimed within Droṇa's hearing that Aśvatthāman was dead.

The way Bhīma executed Kṛṣṇa's *yoga* made matters less difficult for Yudhiṣṭhira when Droṇa asked for the veracity of the news of Aśvatthāman's death. The question put by Droṇa was: Aśvatthāman, my son, is he dead, or not dead? (*ahataṁ vā hataṁ veti papraccha sutam ātmanaḥ* 7.164.94). We are told that Yudhiṣṭhira answered *indistinctly* that the elephant was dead (*avyaktam abravīd rājan hataḥ kuñjara ity uta* 7.164.106). This implies that Yudhiṣṭhira first said *distinctly* (*vyaktam*): "Aśvatthāman was dead", and then added indistinctly that the elephant was dead. At this stage Kṛṣṇa had persuaded Yudhiṣṭhira to tell a little untruth because, according to the charioteer Kṛṣṇa, if one spoke untruth to save one's life, he was not touched by the falsehood of the statement (*anṛtaṁ jīvitasyārthe vadan na spṛśyate 'nṛtaiḥ* 7.164.99).

In practice, however, it turned out that Kṛṣṇa's *yoga* did not produce the desired result, but turned on the Pāṇḍavas like a boomerang. Instead of desisting from combat, Droṇa, enraged at the news of his son's death, unleashed his *brahmāstra* on ordinary soldiers. It led to mass scale destruction, it appearing that all the Pāṇḍava Kṣatriyas would soon be annihilated (7.164.97). Droṇa, in a fit of anger, had committed *adharma* in using the *brahmāstra* on ordinary soldiers, and he was rightly condemned for the massacre. In Saṁjaya's narration of the incident, it is mentioned that sages like Viśvāmitra, Vasiṣṭha, Bhāradvāja and others appeared in the sky and asked Droṇa to stop fighting lest he was provoked to more cruel acts (*nātaḥ krūrataraṁ karma punaḥ kartuṁ tvam arhasi* 7.164.90).

Even after hearing Yudhiṣṭhira's reply that Aśvatthāman was dead, Droṇa continued to fight. He did not, as usually believed, immediately lay down arms. He overwhelmed Dhṛṣṭadyumna by killing his charioteer and disarming him of bow and *gadā*. When Dhṛṣṭadyumna came closer with sword and shield, Droṇa deprived him of these weapons with the special *Vaitastika* arrows intended for close-range attack (ā*sannaghātika* 7.164.150). Immediately afterwards, he shot an arrow which would have proved fatal for Dhṛṣṭadyumna but Sātyaki intercepted and deflected it with ten arrows (7.164.153). Droṇa took up the duel with Dhṛṣṭadyumna again. It was at this juncture that Bhīma rebuked Droṇa – pointing out the tragic irony of his actions. Droṇa, a Brāhmaṇa, had killed thousands of Kṣatriyas. As a Brāhmaṇa it was not his duty to fight, but the Kṣatriyas, whom he had killed were doing their duty to fight. So Droṇa was acting in opposition to his duty by killing those who were acting in accordance with theirs. Moreover, he was killing many for the sake of one (i.e. his son), notwithstanding the fact that the one whom he was fighting for was dead. Yudhiṣṭhira had told him that his son was dead and there was no reason for the Brāhmaṇa to doubt Dharmarāja's words. More than anything else, Bhīma's words struck a chord with Droṇa (*ekasyārthe bahūn hatvā putrasyādharmavid yathā/ svakarmasthān vikarmastho na vyapatrapase katham // sa cādya patitaḥ śete pṛṣṭenāveditas tava / dharmarājena tad vākyaṁ nātiśaṅkitum arhasi* 7.165.31-32).

After Bhīma had spoken, Droṇa laid down his bow. As he was getting ready to lay down the rest of his weapons he made his last address to the Kauravas, exhorting them to continue to battle. This gave Dhṛṣṭadyumna his opportunity (*chidram*), and he rode up to Droṇa's chariot, and severed his head with a sword (7.165.36,52).[7]

---

[7] This was not a very unusual way of killing the opponent. Earlier in the war Dhṛṣṭadyumna had made a similar attempt on Droṇa but had failed (7.72. 23-28). Nakula's duel with Citrasena, son of Karṇa, ended when Nakula mounted Citrasena's chariot and cut off his head with a sword (9.9.16-19). Perhaps Droṇa

Kṛṣṇa's first *yoga* of the war ended thus. His aim was limited, but he failed to achieve it. In the execution of Kṛṣṇa's *yoga* Bhīma's role was highly significant. Dhṛṣṭadyumna merely carried out the final act.

Kṛṣṇa soon had another opportunity to contribute his second *yoga* of the war the same day. Hearing of his father's death Aśvatthāman, furious, unleashed his powerful Nārāyaṇāstra against the Pāṇḍavas. No one, apparently not even Arjuna, knew how to combat this missile. Kṛṣṇa came to the rescue and asked everyone to lay down their arms and alight from their vehicles. This was the *yoga,* the remedy, to combat the Nārāyaṇāstra (*śīghraṁ nyasyata śastrāṇi vāhebhyaś cāvarohata / eṣa yogo 'tra vihitaḥ* 7.170.38). Had the *yogeśvara* Kṛṣṇa not been present to reveal this *yoga,* all the Pāṇḍavas and their armies would have been reduced to ashes.

3. Fall of Karṇa : During the Mahābhārata war only Karṇa was a real threat to Arjuna as he was in possession of a *śakti,* received from Indra, which was known to be a sure weapon of death. Unlike the other *śaktis,* many of which were hurled and broken in the war, this *śakti* was not combatable by any weapon – once unleashed it necessarily struck and destroyed the target.

In this light, one wonders why Karṇa did not use this *śakti* the very first day of the war. The partial answer is that Karṇa did not take part in battle for the first ten days of the war during Bhīṣma's generalship. Karṇa's appearance on the battlefield on the eleventh day coincided with Arjuna being challenged by the Saṁśaptakas and thus being remote from the main battle scene. Even so, the possibility of a chance encounter of these heroes could not be ruled out. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, puzzled by the fact that Karṇa did not use his *śakti* in such encounters, asked Saṁjaya[8] the reason for this. Saṁjaya replied that Fate deluded Karṇa's mind on such occasions (7.157. 1-4; 7.158.3, 6-8). This writer's belief

---

was not a good swordsman. This might explain Dhṛṣṭadyumna's use of sword against him on two occasions.

[8] A similar question was put by Sātyaki to Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa's reply was that whenever Karṇa came face to face with Arjuna Kṛṣṇa deluded the mind of Karṇa (*aham eva tu rādheyaṁ mohayāmi yudhāṁ vara* 7.157. 30-31, 37). If this was true, it can also be looked upon as Kṛṣṇā's *yoga*.

with respect to this issue, formed after studying the battle descriptions, is that it was not customary to use one's special weapons in the very first encounter. These formidable weapons were resorted to only if the ordinary ones proved inefficacious. Furthermore, Karṇa's prowess as a warrior would have been marred if he had slain Arjuna with Indra's *śakti.* In such an event, Indra's weapon would have been credited with this accomplishment (the slaying of Arjuna). This was unacceptable to Karṇa, the proud warrior.

During the night war at the end of the fourteenth day, Karṇa began wreaking havoc on the Pāṇḍava army. This induced Yudhiṣṭhira to ask Arjuna to face Karṇa and stem the tide. Arjuna showed his readiness to accept the designated task but the encounter did not take place at this particular time. Had it occurred, this would have been the first major encounter between the two heroes, and wherein Karṇa could have made use of his formidable and potent *śakti*. Kṛṣṇa, the charioteer, was responsible for preventing Arjuna from combat with Karṇa, and, instead, assigning Ghaṭotkaca, the son of Bhīma, the task of facing the Kaurava warrior. Ghaṭotkaca reversed the tide on the Kauravas through his *māyā.* With the reversal, Kauravas were compelled to assign some warrior the task of slaying Ghaṭotkaca to save their army from annihilation. Karṇa had no choice but to submit to the persistent pressure of his partisans to employ his *śakti* (7.154.48-51). As a result, Ghaṭotkaca was killed but Arjuna was saved. Karṇa, deprived of his *śakti,* was now as good as dead (7.155.12).

Sacrificing Ghaṭotkaca to save Arjuna was the first *yoga* employed by Kṛṣṇa against Karṇa.

Kṛṣṇa's second *yoga* saved Arjuna from another of Karṇa's deadly missiles. Karṇa had preserved, specially for Arjuna, a sharp serpent-head arrow carrying *nāga* Aśvasena, son of Takṣaka. Aśvasena wanted to avenge his mother, who had perished in the Khāṇḍava fire – for which he held Arjuna responsible. Karṇa aimed and shot the arrow. But Kṛṣṇa, the *excellent charioteer,* promptly applied pressure on the horses with his feet and forced them to kneel making the chariot tilt downwards. Thus Karṇa's missile missed its mark – Arjuna's throat – but carried off Arjuna's headgear. However, this was of no consequence whatever.[9] (*saṇdhīyamānaṁ bhujagaṁ dṛṣṭvā karṇeṇa mādhavaḥ/ ākramya syandanaṁ padbhāyaṁ balena balināṁ varaḥ / / avagāḍhe rathe bhūmau jānubhyām agaman hayāḥ / tataḥ śaraḥ so 'bhyahanat kirīṭam tasya dhīmataḥ* / / 8.66. 10-11).

Thus was lost Karṇa's last deadly missile. Kṛṣṇa had to employ an additional *yoga* to enable Arjuna to slay Karṇa. The first two *yogas* were for Arjuna's defence; the third one was for the purpose of his offence. Kṛṣṇa had told Arjuna that there was just one stratagem, one *yoga*, to effect Karṇa's death. This opportunity would present itself just once – when Karṇa's chariot wheel stuck fast in a crevice. Kṛṣṇa stressed that Arjuna must remember this at the proper time (*eko hi yogo 'sya bhaved vadhāya chidre hy enaṁ (i.e. karṇam) . . . kṛcchraprāptaṁ rathacakre nimagne / hanyāḥ pūrvaṁ tvaṁ tu saṁjñāṁ vicārya* 7.155.28). Obviously, Kṛṣṇa had minutely observed the terrain of the battleground during the first few days of the war and noted its ascents and descents, its smooth stretches and crevices. Although this has not been specifically stated in the Mahābhārata, it is safe to surmise that Kṛṣṇa managed to ensure that Karṇa's chariot-wheel rolled into a crevice (8.66.59). This surmise is based on the fact that the charioteer Kṛṣṇa had suggested this as a *yoga* to Arjuna well in advance. That Karṇa's wheel actually stuck fast in a crevice was no accident but a manoeuvre well planned and executed by Kṛṣṇa. Arjuna did not fail to act on Kṛṣṇa's advice. When Arjuna's arrow struck Karṇa the Kaurava warrior's body fell on the battleground (8.67.26).

4. The Fall of Duryodhana: Kṛṣṇa,of course, also had to offer a couple of *yogas* ('suggestions') for Duryodhana's downfall.

In the epic narrative, Yudhiṣṭhira can be seen to have behaved extremely rashly, belying his image of a person of weighted judgment. When all the Kaurava generals fell and only the decisive battle with Duryodhana remained, Yudhiṣṭhira made this enemy certain recklessly generous and thoughtless offers. He allowed Duryodhana: (1) the choice of weapon for the duel; (2) the choice of adversary; (3) victory and the kingdom if his chosen opponent was slain as no remaining Pāṇḍava would engage in further combat (this, of course, also implied the immediate end of the war) (9.31.24-26, 53).

---

[9] As the Hindi adage goes: *sar salāmat to pagḍi pacās* 'If head is intact, one can have fifty turbans.'

Kṛṣṇa severely blamed Yudhiṣṭhira for these bold offers (9.57. 9-15). In the first instance, Yudhiṣṭhira need not have sought out Duryodhana when the latter was in hiding and challenged this enemy to a duel. Left alone, Duryodhana might have fled. Having challenged Duryodhana, Yudhiṣṭhira should not have given him the choice of weapon as he was sure to favour *gadā*, his adept handling of which had made him a famed warrior. But having committed this unstrategic blunder, Yudhiṣṭhaira should not have further compounded the predicament by allowing Duryodhana the choice of opponent. This suicidal step could only be made by Yudhiṣṭhira the reckless gamgler. Had Duryodhana, armed with the *gadā,* chosen to combat any Pāṇḍava other than Bhīma - including Arjuna – the outcome could not be in any doubt whatever – doom for the Pāṇḍavas. Yudhiṣṭhira's last offer barred any other Pāṇḍava from lifting his bow and continuing the conflict in case of the chosen Pāṇḍava adversary was vanquished.

Duryodhana's request had been quite different – time to don his armour and the Pāṇḍavas should not jointly attack him. He was prepared to fight with them all in succession (9.31.11, 49-50).

Kṛṣṇa rightly viewed Yudhiṣṭhira's terms – of the nature of concessions – as rash acts (*sāhasa* 9.32. 3, 5). He compared Yudhiṣṭhira's preparedness to engage Duryodhana in uneven combat with his previous readiness to play an uneven game of dice with Śakuni. Had Duryodhana chosen to fight with Yudhiṣṭhira, the result of the duel, as of the dice game, could be easily predicted.

The Pāṇḍavas were, however, very fortunate. The proud Duryodhana did not grab the easy method Yudhiṣṭhira offered. True to form and as expected, the Kaurava chose to fight with the *gadā* but refused to select the Pāṇḍava combatant apparently viewing all as inferior in *gadāyuddha* and therefore unworthy to challenge, as per the rule of the war. So Duryodhana left the Pāṇḍavas to choose their warrior and was ready to combat anyone who dared (9.31.60).

Now it became opportune and essential for Kṛṣṇa to step forward and check Yudhiṣṭhira. Yudhiṣṭhira's thoughtless behaviour made Kṛṣṇa visualize disaster – Dharmarāja challenging Duryodhana to combat. Seizing the chance, Kṛṣṇa told Yudhiṣṭhira that even Arjuna was no match for Duryodhana in the *gadāyuddha* (9.32.2, 12). The Pāṇḍavas could not decidedly be sure of success with even Bhīma as Duryodhana's opponent, but at least such would make a duel proper. Thus Bhīma stepped forward for combat and assured Kṛṣṇa that he would do the needful.

Kṛṣṇa's second and most crucial contribution to Duryodhana's downfall was made during the ensuing duel between the warriors. Duryodhana's evident skill and superiority – jumping and moving obliquely (*caraty urdhvaṁ ca tiryak ca* 9.57.16) frightened Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna that it was impossible for Bhīma to emerge victorious if he continued fighting strictly according to the rules – violation was the only recourse. Kṛṣṇa stated this like cold facts (*bhīmasenas tu dharmeṇa yudhyamāno na jeṣyati / anyāyena tu yudhyan vai hanyād eṣa suyodhanam* 9.57.4, 8), and reminded Arjuna of Bhīma's vow to break Duryodhana's thighs 9.57.6). Arjuna understood Kṛṣṇa's suggestion that Bhīma should strike Duryodhana's thighs, inspite of this being a violation of the rules. Arjuna, therefore, stroked his thigh, giving Bhīma a visual hint. (9.57.18).

Bhīma understood, changed strategy, and moved in such a way as to confuse Duryodhana. Duryodhana made a minor error which enabled Bhīma to move in closer. When Duryodhana was within reach Bhīma hurled his *gadā* at him aiming at his thighs. Duryodhana probably did not anticipate such a violation, but quickly dodged the weapon, foiling Bhīma. He was now aware of Bhīma's intention and thus forewarned. He now knew that Bhīma, next time, would aim a little aside to prevent Duryodhana from successfully dodging the mace again. So at Bhīma's subsequent throw of the *gadā* Duryodhana jumped upwards and fell into Bhīma's trap -- the weapon struck and broke Duryodhana's thighs, for Bhīma had correctly anticipated the Kaurava's manoeuvre – that he would jump up – and had aimed higher (*abudhyat bhīmasenas tat rājñas tasya cikīrṣitam* 9.57.42,45).

Thus goes the story of Duryodhana's defeat which Bhīma accomplished by recourse to a *yoga* (*hradād āhūya yogena bhīmasenena pātitaḥ* 9.1.12). It has been observed that Kṛṣṇa suggested this. In this *yoga,* as in the *yoga* employed to discourage Droṇa from combat, an element of *anyāya* or *adharma* was involved. In both cases, the *yogas* were suggested by Kṛṣṇa and carried out by Bhīma. In the earlier case, the *adharma* was in the form of a false proclamation. In the present case, it took the form of violating an established rule of the *gadāyuddha* – not to strike below the navel (*adho nābhyā na hantavyam iti śāstrasya niścayaḥ* 9.59.6).

The vanquishment of Duryodhana ends the examination of the different *yogas* which Kṛṣṇa suggested to Arjuna and the other Pāṇḍavas for purposes of overpowering some important Kaurava heroes. There is, thus, complete truth in Saṁjaya's statement: without Kṛṣṇa, the master of strategems, Arjuna would not have defeated Karṇa, nor other adversaries and would have perished with horses, chariot, and flag-staff (*na rakṣed yadi kṛṣṇas taṁ pārthaṁ karṇān mahārathāt // sāśvarathadhvajaḥ saṁkhye dhṛtarāṣṭra pated bhuvi / vinā janārdanaṁ pārtho yogānām īṣvaraṁ prabhum / tais tair upāyair bahubhī rakṣyamāṇaḥ sa pārthiva/ jayaty abhimukhaḥ śatrūn pārthaḥ kṛṣṇena pālitaḥ/ /* 7.157. 13-15). If it was Saṁjaya's view that without Kṛṣṇa's stratagems, as he was *yogānām īśvaraḥ,* the Pāṇḍavas would not have been the victors, then it must necessarily follow that when he refers to Kṛṣṇa, the *yogeśvara*, by the side of Arjuna, the *dhanurdhara,* both jointly leading their side to victory, the word *yogeśvara* means 'the master of war-strategies' and not 'the master of the *yoga* philosophy or of the superhuman power'.

In addition to these *yogas* suggested by Kṛṣṇa, there are others not explicityly stated and a few wrongly attributed to him. As regards the implicit *yogas,* the one related to the death of Śalya is important. Śalya, disarmed, rushed at Yudhiṣṭhira barehanded in apparent challenge to a wrestling bout. Yudhiṣṭhira struck him down with a *śakti,* remembering what Govinda (i.e. Kṛṣṇa) had earlier told him (*govindavākyaṁ tvaritaṁ vicintya dadhre matiṁ śalyavināśanāya* 9.16.36). However, there is no account in the Mahābhārata of Kṛṣṇa's specific advice. One can only surmise that since Śalya was known for his strength, Kṛṣṇa anticipated that he would, if disarmed, challenge his adversary to a wrestling match. Kṛṣṇa, therefore, may have advised the Pāṇḍavas never to accept Śalya's challenge to a wrestling match and terminate the duel by some other method.

The other three unclear *yogas* have been stated by Kṛṣṇa himself. He told Arjuna that he eliminated Jarāsandha, Śiśupāla and Ekalavya through various *yogas* (*jarāsandhaś cedirājo mahātmā mahābalaś caikalavyo niṣādaḥ /ekaikaśo nihatāḥ sarva eva yogais tais tais tvaddhitārthaṁ mayaiva* 7.155.29). Thereupon Arjuna specifically asked Kṛṣṇa what these *yogas* were. Kṛṣṇa replied at length but kept the secret of the stratagems to himself. He once again emphasized that the three heroes could not be conquered in straight battles even by the gods without resorting to *yogas* (7.156.6).

Jarāsandha wielded a special *gadā* the possession of which made him invincible. During a battle with the Yādavas he threw the *gadā* at Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa to kill them. But Balarāma managed to deflect it with a missile, *sthūṇākarṇa* (7.156. 8-11). Kṛṣṇa's *yoga* is not referred to in this account. Later, Bhīma slew Jarāsandha in a straight wrestling match. It is, therefore, unclear how Kṛṣṇa's *yoga* was in any way employed for Jarāsandha's death.

With respect to Ekalavya, Kṛṣṇa reminded Arjuna how Droṇa had deprived Ekalavya of his right thumb under the pretext of having been his teacher. Thereafter, it went easy for Kṛṣṇa to eliminate Ekalavya at the head of a battle (*saṁgrāmamūradhani* 7.156.17-21). No other details of this event are available and hence there is no information as to the time of the war in which Ekalavya was killed, nor how Kṛṣṇa was involved.

Śiśupāla was killed by Kṛṣṇa in the hall of the Pāṇḍavas at the time of the Rājasūya sacrifice (7.156.21). In the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata where this incident is narrated, there is no reference to the use of any *yoga* by Kṛṣṇa.

Among the *yogas* erroneously attributed to Kṛṣṇa, the events leading to Bhūriśravas' death need be recalled. Bhūriśravas and Sātyaki were two Yādava heroes who fought on the sides of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas respectively. While engaged in combat, Bhūriśravas was about to kill Sātyaki with a sword, but

Arjuna severed his swordhand with an arrow from a vantage point away from the Yādava's vision. Arjuna was justly condemned by Bhūriśravas for this extremely serious violation. There is no other example in the Mahābhārata of such extreme intervention – especially serious as the transgressing warrior (*dhanuadhara*) was Arjuna in the company of a charioteer known as the master of strategems (*yegeśvara*). Thereby we can understand Bhūriśravas' presumption that the violation which crippled him from further battle must have been Kṛṣṇa's suggestion, Arjuna being incapable of this on his own (*vāsudevamataṁ nūnaṁ naitat tvayy upapadyate* 7.118.13). According to Bhūriśravas, only a friend of Kṛṣṇa, none else, could commit such a deed (*yo na kṛṣṇasakho bhavet* 7.118.14).

However, Kṛṣṇa is not to be blamed for this particular violation. This is because Kṛṣṇa merely drew Arjuna's attention to Sātyaki's predicament. He did not actually advise Arjuna how to handle the situation. The accusation of Bhūriśravas is, therefore, baseless.

The second instance is related to the slaying of Jayadratha. This erroneous attribution, however, is not found in the critically edited text of the Mahābhārata but in some interpolated passages.

There is no doubt that Kṛṣṇa helped Arjuna in numerous ways to reach Jayadratha's hiding place . He managed to force the chariot forward even if Arjuna succeeded in making only narrow openings in the barricade (7.69.20; 7.74, 4). While zeroing in on the opponent, he unyoked the horses to refresh them so that they could gallop on at greater speed. In the end, he drew Arjuna's attention to the fact that the sun was about to set and Arjuna should, therefore, quickly kill Jayadratha. Immediately afterwards Arjuna decapitated Jayadratha with an arrow – within sight of all the heroes with some daylight to spare.

Kṛṣṇa thus did not actually contribute any *yoga* for effecting Jayadratha's death.

Some narrators of ancient times were, however, dissatisfied with this older account handed down to them, feeling that Kṛṣṇa's role in helping Arjuna to fulfil his vow – Jayadratha's death – must have been crucial. Hence a change is found in the Devanāgarī and the Bengali versions of the Mahābhārata where certain passages were inserted in which Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna that he would employ some *yoga* to illusorily block the sun to deceive Jayadratha. The author of this interpolation knew that Kṛṣṇa had earlier suggested certain *yogas* to the Pāṇḍavas. Hence he tells us that Kṛṣṇa, the *yogī* who knew many such *yogas*, created darkness temporarily to produce the illusion of sunset. These versions, however, do not explicily state Kṛṣṇa's device to create darkness (*yogī yogena saṁyukto yogināṁ īśvaro hariḥ /asṛjat tamaḥ* 7. Appendix I, No.16).

This deficiency was amended by the Telugu and the Grantha versions of the southern recension[10] of the Mahābhārata. According to these two versions, Kṛṣṇa thought of his *sudarśana cakra* and ordered it to cover the sun so that every one got the impression that the sun had set (7.1010*)

We have now examined all the *yogas* (those in the critically edited text as well as those in the interpolated passages) suggested by Kṛṣṇa to win the war. Before making an independent assessment, getting to know Duryodhana's and Aśvatthāman's views on these *yogas* will be worthwhile. (9.60. 29-38; 10.5.9-16). Duryodhana called all these *yogas* 'crooked means' or 'crooked ways' (*jihma upāya, jihma mārga*). Aśvatthāman did not indict Kṛṣṇa but did list Pāṇḍava violations of the path (*setu*) of *dharma*.

For the most part, both Kaurava warriors have found fault with the Pāṇḍavas on the same grounds. Both criticized the method Śikhaṇḍin and Arjuna employed to defeat Bhīṣma. Aśvatthāman exaggerated the facts in the allegation that Bhīṣma fell after he had laid down the arms and was therefore, weaponless (*nyastaśastra* and *nirāyudha* 9.60.13; 10.5.19) implying that his fall was like Droṇa's. Regarding the fall of Droṇa both charge the Pāṇḍavas for killing a warrior when he had laid down his arms. Here Duryodhana also ascribed blame to Kṛṣṇa for having suggested the killing of the elephant called Aśvatthāman (9.60.31; 10.5.17). In addition, Duryodhana castigated Kṛṣṇa for failing to control Dhṛṣṭadyumna when he rushed to decapitate Droṇa

---

[10] This information is not found in the Malayalam version of the epic. The Southern recension as a whole simply says that, according to Kṛṣṇa, deceit (*kapaṭa*) was required to cover the sun Hence Kṛṣṇa employed some means (*upāya*) for this purpose (*srakṣyāmy ahaṁ upāyaṁ tam ādityasyāpavāraṇe* 7.1009*)

(9.60.32). In the case of Karṇa, Duryodhana found fault with Kṛṣṇa for employment of all the three *yogas* mentioned above (9.60.33,35, 36). Aśvatthāman perceived only Karṇa's entrapment – manoeuring his chariot wheel into a crevice – as a transgression (9.5.18). Both Duryodhana and Aśvatthāman squarely blame Kṛṣṇa for Sātyaki's decapitation of Bhūriśravas when he had lost his right hand and had renounced life (*prāya* 9.60.34; 10.5.20). Both Kaurava heroes also mention the *adharma* of breaking Duryodhana's thighs. Aśvatthāman, however, exaggerated when he alleged that Duryodhana was encircled by many when he fell (9.60.27-28; 10.5.22; 10.1.57).

It is significant that neither Duryodhana nor Aśvatthāman had a thing say against Kṛṣṇa for the deaths of Jayadratha and Śalya. Even according to them, no *adharma*, no *yoga*, was involved in these two cases.

In the light of the information available in the Mahābhārata, examination of the charge-sheet framed by Duryodhana and Aśvatthāman makes it easy to dismiss the accusations against Kṛṣṇa with respect to the fall of Bhīṣma and the death of Bhūriśravas. Kṛṣṇa had no *yoga* to suggest in these cases. Regarding the three events related to combat with Karṇa, Kṛṣṇa should not be blamed for properly guiding the Pāṇḍavas to despatch Ghaṭotkaca to deal with Karṇa, for faithfully performing a charioteer's role while saving Arjuna from the serpent-head arrow, and for tricking Karṇa so that his chariot wheel stuck in crevice.

Only in the cases of Droṇa and Duryodhana did Kṛṣṇa suggest the *yogas* which were violative. Kṛṣṇa himself admitted on both occasions that there was an element of *adharma* or *anyāya* in those means. In the case of Droṇa, the element of *adharma* was limited to the false proclamation of Aśvatthāman's death. He did not suggest decapitating Droṇa when he had laid down his arms. Quite clearly, Kṛṣṇa's intention was to somehow force Droṇa to retire from the battle for that day. But, as seen, his *yoga* led to a chain of events which resulted in Droṇa's death.

For the fall of Duryodhana, Kṛṣṇa did suggest the means which violated the rules of the *gadāyuddha*. But there was no other alternative if the war for a just cause was to be won. Yudhiṣṭhira had put the Pāṇḍavas in such a situation that only an extreme step could extricate them.

The Pāṇḍavas were fighting for a just cause. The war was a *dharmayuddha* for them in the sense that they were fighting for the sake of justice. Victory of the *dharmayuddha* made Kṛṣṇa suggest the use of minimum *adharma*. Of the eight *yogas* suggested by him during the war, six were in perfect order. We have just examined the nature of the remaining two and tried to understand their scope and necessity.

If we recall at this stage the last stanza of the Gītā (18.78), it is possible to state that Saṁjaya concurs with our assessment. As he says that where Kṛṣṇa and Pārtha come together there lie not only victory and prosperity but also lasting morality (*dhruvā nītiḥ*), so in his opinion too there was no *anīti* or immorality involved if minimum of *adharma* was practised for achieving a just cause.

CHAPTER 3

The Yogeśvaras of the Kauravas
(*With An Excursus on the Rāmāyaṇa War*)

As to the identity of the Yogeśvaras of the Kauravas, we have to consider the three events which were related to the attempts of the Kauravas to defeat the Pāṇḍavas. The three incidents took place:

1. Before the war; 2. During the war proper; and 3. As an aftermath of the war.

1. Before the War: In his rivalry with the Pāṇḍavas, Duryodhana's main objective, to begin with, was only to deprive the Pāṇḍavas of the vast amount of wealth they had acquired at the time of the Rājasūya. Only afterwards did he think of depriving them of their kingdom as well. When Duryodhana returned to Hāstinapura after the Rājasūya he was extremely jealous of the Pāṇḍavas. As he admitted first to Śakuni and later to Dhṛtarārṣra, he was burning with anger and jealousy since he had been a witness to the enormous riches of the Pāṇḍavas. He simply did not wish to live (2.43.26-27; 2.45. 43-44). This envy was the root cause of all the subsequent events and later of the war, and not, as usually assumed, the humiliation to which Duryodhana was supposedly subjected to while touring the Pāṇḍava *sabhā*. In point of fact, the whole incident of Duryodhana's tour of the *sabhā* can be shown to be an interpolation as per both internal and extenral evidence. This is, however, not our concern.

The first Kaurava attempt to deprive the Pāṇḍavas of their wealth was, as well known, when they suggested a game of dice with them. In this attempt, the Yogeśvara or the 'master of strategems' of the Kauravas was undoubtedly Śakuni. Śakuni was the one who suggested to Duryodhana to play a game of dice, rather than start a war, to achieve his objective. He told Duryodhana that Yudhiṣṭhira loved the game of dice but was not an expert player. Śakuni, on the other hand, was an acknowledged and unrivalled master of the game. Hence Śakuni advised Duryodhana to challenge Yudhiṣṭhira to a game of dice, and leave the rest to him (2.44.18-20).

Some similarity exists between the roles played by the *yogeśvara* Śakuni before the game of dice and by the *yogeśvara* Kṛṣṇa before the war. Arjuna, just before the war's beginning, was overwhelmed by some pious considerations and was therefore reluctant to take up arms. Kṛṣṇa had to advise him properly to inspire him to fight. Śakuni too had to exercise some persuasion on Duryodhana, who was overwhelmed with grief and jealousy, to choose the means of the game of dice (2.44.14-16; 2.45.36-38). In fact, while advising Duryodhana he thrice used (2.44.4,6,8) the famous expression, *tatra kā paridevanā,* also used by Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā (6.24.28), although for a different purpose.

The game of dice and war were the two legitimate means available to the epic Kṣatriyas to deprive their opponents of their belongings.[1] In the well-known Nala episode, Puṣkara challenged Nala to a game of dice and reduced him to a pauper. When Nala was taught the science with which he could exactly count any number of objects placed before him, he knew he had become invincible in the game of dice. Hence he challenged Puṣkara and asked him to choose the means: dice or war (*punaḥ pravartatāṁ dyūtam ... na ced vāñchasi tad dyūtam yuddhadyūtaṁ pravartatām* 3.77.6,8; also 3.77.10). Puṣkara chose *dyūta* and lost the kingdom.

In the above account, Nala said: *yuddhadyūtaṁ pravartatām* and not just: *yuddhaṁ pravartatāṃ*. This expression deserves notice as it tells us that war and *dyūta* were looked upon not as two radically different means, but as two closely comparable ones available to the Kṣatriyas. Certain terms used in these two procedures – game of dice (*dyūta*) and war (*yuddha)* – are exactly parallel. In both, an *āhvāna* or an open challenge preceded the actual action. Śakuni asked Duryodhana to challenge Yudhiṣṭhira to a game (*taṁ tvaṁ dyūte samāhvaya* 2.44.19). Similarly in war, as seen before, it was customary to challenge the opponent before striking him with a weapon (*samābhāṣya prahartavayam* 6.1.30). Normally a Kṣatriya was not supposed to reject a challenge of combat. This is why Arjuna said that he never refused a challenge.

---

[1] According to Aśvatthāman, a warrior should prefer war to dice (4. 45.7)

This was his *vrata* (*āhūto na nivarteyam iti me vratam āhitam* 7.16.39). Similarly it was the *vrata* of Yudhiṣṭhira not to refuse the challenge for a *dyūta*. He used almost exactly the same words as Arjuna (*āhūto 'haṁ na nivarte kadācit, tad āhitaṁ śāśvataṁ vai vrataṁ me* 2.52.16). Anything staked in the game of dice is called *dhana*. Whenever Yudhiṣṭhira announced a stake, he said *etad rājan dhanaṁ mahyam* (2.53.23; 2.54.1, etc.). And *dhana* in Sanskrit means 'anything that is won in war, booty'. This is why Arjuna has the by-name Dhanaṁjaya. A further point of similarity between *dyūta* and *yuddha* lies in the way in which the means used by players and combatants against their opponents were handled. In war, the opponents shot arrows at each other by drawing the bowstring with their fists. In the *dyūta* too, the gamblers cast the dice from their fists. Hence in metaphorical references to duels between two heroes in terms of the game of dice, or to the games of dice in terms of duels, the epic poet viewed the gambler's seat as the hero's chariot, the gambler's fist holding the dice as the warrior's fist from which the arrows were discharged, the dice released from the fist as the arrows flowing from the bow and the wealth staked in the game of dice as the life the hero forfeited (6.15.66-68). In war, the two parties occasionally agreed to the observance of some specific rules. In the game of dice too, although there were centain generally accepted rules, the two parties could agree on some specific rules for a particular game. Śakuni asked Yudhiṣṭhira before the start of the game if he wished to stipulate any particular rule (*samyo 'stu yudhiṣṭhira* 2.53.1). The only thing Yudhiṣṭhira specificied was that the game should not be deceitful, a condition to which Śakuni readily agreed (2.53.2-5).

In the game of dice the loser was required to declare his new *paṇa* (stake) for the next game. The winner was not required to place a new stake since his stake for the previous game could continue for the next. Hence Yudhiṣṭhira, who lost one game after another, had to place new stakes for each subsequent game, while Śakuni, who did not lose a single game, could continue throughout with his stake for the first game. In the war, likewise, the general of the army is the principal stake. Since the Kauravas lost one battle after the other, they had to appoint new generals for each subsequent battle. They began with Bhīṣma and ended up with Aśvatthāman. Conversely, the Pāṇḍavas, who did not lose a single battle, could continue with their first general, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, without being forced to make any change.

A duel normally took place between two warriors. There are however, a few good examples of combat of one versus many. The battle in which Abhimanyu was slain is an oft-cited example where as many as six Kaurava warriors together fought with him. The game of dice was also played by one against one – Yudhiṣṭhira against Śakuni, Nala against Puṣkara, and Virāṭa against Kaṅka. However, there are a couple of indications in the Mahābhārata in which other versions of these games of dice current in ancient times are represented.[2] Draupadī in one instance says: Yudhiṣṭhira was challenged in the *sabhā* by many gamblers and was defeated by them all together (*āhuya rājā kuśalaiḥ/ sabhāyām . . . dyūtapriyair nātikṛtaprayatnaḥ/ . . . saṁbhūya sarvaisí ca jitaḥ* 2.6. 43-44). Similarly, Damayantī reports that Nala was defeated not by one opponent but by some gamlers (*sa kaiścit ... narādhamaiḥ / āhūya ... devane kuśalair jihmair jito rājyaṁ vasūni ca* 3.61.78). These stray remarks of Draupadī and Damayantī indicate different versions of the game of the dice in which the game was played by one against several.

The game of dice, which has thus many parallels with war-duels, was the first means adopted by the Kauravas to deprive the Pāṇḍavas of their wealth and kingdom. Śakuni, having successfully persuaded Duryodhana to gamble, himself took charge of the game and led his side to victory. He, as the *yogeśvara* of the Kauravas, remained neither a silent spectator nor an occasional adviser, but the active and sole participant. An accomplished gambler, i.e. in terms of fighting with weapons an excellent 'archer', his fist was his 'bow', the dice his 'arrows', his knowledge of the science of dice his 'bowstring', and his seat near the *adhidevana* (the place where dice were thrown) his chariot (2.151.3). He knew all the tricks, i.e. *nikṛtis,* of the game as an ideal charioteer like Kṛṣṇa knew all the *yogas* of the war. For the game of dice Śakuni was the *yogeśvara,* or to coin a parallel expression, the *nikṛtīśvara* of the Kauravas who gave his side no moment of despair throughout the game.

---

[2] Complete descriptions of these different versions are, however, lost to us.

2. The War proper: The second Kaurava attempt to defeat the Pāṇḍavas was by waging a war against them. Their first commander was Bhīṣma,during whose leadership of the first ten days there is no report of any special strategy or *yoga* suggested by him for victory.

The situation changed to some extent when, after the fall of Bhīṣma, Droṇa took charge of the Kaurava army. Of all the Kaurava generals he was the one who, as the teacher of the science of warfare, was expected to play the role of the *yogeśvara* for the Kauravas, which he did on a few occassions.

To realize the significance of the moves of Droṇa, it must first be noted that Duryodhana had changed his war objective when Droṇa was appointed to lead the army. The objective set before Bhīṣma during his generalship was the killing of the Pāṇḍavas . This could not be realized in spite of ten days of war. Duryodhana was apparently convinced that even Droṇa would be reluctant to kill the Pāṇḍavas. Therefore, he told Droṇa that he wanted him to capture Yudhiṣṭhira alive (7.11.6), saying this would suffice. Droṇa agreed to carry this out on condition that Arjuna was somehow removed from Yudhiṣṭhira's proximity, for as long as Arjuna protected Yudhiṣṭhira it would be impossible for even Droṇa to capture Yudhiṣṭhira.

It is well known that on the third day of his generalship Droṇa arranged the Kaurava army in a circular formation called *cakravyūha* (7.33.12). It was extremely difficult to penetrate this *vyūha* and attack the opponent. Why did Droṇa arrange his army this way? Certainly he did not do so to trap Abhimanyu. But in view of the war-objective set before him, it may be said that Droṇa did so with an eye on Yudhiṣṭhira. He apparently thought that when Arjuna was removed under some pretext (*yoga*) from the main battle scene (7.32.13), Yudhiṣṭhira, with the other Pāṇḍava heroes' aid, would enter the *cakravyūha* making it possible to capture him. This was then a double strategy or *yoga* planned by Droṇa – separation of Arjuna from Yudhiṣṭhira and enticing the latter into the *vyūha*. In actual practice, however, as we know, Yudhiṣṭhira passed on the extremely difficult responsibility of penetrating the *vyūha* to Abhimanyu (7.34.12-15). Abhimanyu agreed to undertake the task but asked for constant support from the rear. Once Abhimanyu entered the *vyūha,* Jayadratha, with a view to obtaining a short-term advantage over the Pāṇḍavas by killing him prevented all the Pāṇḍavas from rendering any assistance to their comrade-in-arms, Undeterred, Abhimanyu fought so ferociously that to contain him became the Kaurvas' immediate concern instead of capturing Yudhiṣṭhira. At this critical juncture Droṇa suggested his second *yoga* for defeating Abhimanyu. He told Karṇa: "Abhimanyu wears an armour which can never be penetrated by your arrows. Hence you cannot kill him with arrows. But it is possible for you to cut off his bow or the bowstring, the reins of his horses, and kill the horses and his wheel-protectors. Your effort shall be to force Abhimanyu to turn away (*vimukhīkṛtya*) and then attack him. As long as Abhimanyu wields his bow he cannot be conquered. So first deprive him of his bow and his chariot (7.47.26-30)."

The danger posed by Abhimanyu was so serious that the Kaurava heroes lost no time in acting on Droṇa's advice. Karṇa disarmed Abhimanyu of his bow, Kṛtavarman killed the horses, and Kṛpa the wheel-protectors. As was expected, Abhimanyu's response was not to retire but to take up his sword and shield. Droṇa himself intervened at this juncture, disarming the warrior of sword, and Karṇa smashed the shield. Abhimanyu lifted the chariot-wheel but was disarmed of this also by some unnamed warriors. Finally he resorted to a mace and Duḥśāsana's son killed him in a duel.

Droṇa's *yoga* in arranging the *cakravyūha* must have been, as just suggested, to capture Yudhiṣṭhira – a ploy which failed. However, this enabled him to achieve what Bhīṣma, during the first ten days of war, could not : to put a formidable Pāṇḍava warrior out of action.

The next opportunity to display his skill as the master of *yogas* presented itself to Droṇa on the war's next day. He was required to make tight security arrangements for Jayadratha's protection. Arjuna's vow to kill Jayadratha had terrified the latter. Jayadratha expressed his desire to withdraw from the war and return home unless he was assured of complete safety (7.52.4-6). First Duryodhana and subsequently Droṇa gave him this assurance (*ahaṁ hi rakṣitā tāta bhayāt tvām* 7.52.25). Droṇa arranged the army the next day in such a way as to make it impossible for Arjuna to reach Jayadratha (*vyūhiṣyāmi ca taṁ vyūhaṁ yaṁ pārtho na tariṣyati* 7.52.26). This *vyūha* was of the *śakaṭa* or a 'cart' type, with a *padma* or 'lotus'-like arrangement at its rear (7.53.27). It was also known as *cakra-śakaṭa* (7.63.21). The lotus-like arrangement at the rear was specially difficult to penetrate (7.63.23). In the middle of this 'lotus' would be a sūcī or 'needle' *vyūha.* The head of this *sūcīvyūha* would be guarded by Kṛtavarman, followed by Jalasandha of the Kāṁboja country, and Duryodhana – one of the two who had assured Jayadratha of safety (*abhaya*). Behind all these defences would stand Jayadratha, protected by a large army. The *sūcīvyūha* itself would be guarded on all sides by a thousand chosen soldiers who would never show their backs to the enemy (*yodhānāṁ anivartinām* 7.63.24-27).

Droṇa, no doubt, knew well how to make the arrangements of the army (*vyūha)* impenetrable. He himself stood at the entrance of the *vyūha* (*bhāradvājo mukhe sthitaḥ*) 7.63.28) to thwart anyone entering without first defeating him. He did not expect any reputed Pāṇḍava hero – and one could think of only three: Arjuna, Bhīma and Sātyaki – to bypass him to enter the *vyūha.* But this was exactly what the three heroes did. Arjuna at first tried to solicit Droṇa's favour by reminding him that he was as good to him as his son Aśvatthāman. But Droṇa did not yield. Droṇa told Arjuna that he (Arjuna) could not enter the *vyūha* and reach Jayadratha without first combating and defeating him (Droṇa) (7.66.7). Arjuna's attempt to do so failed miserably. At this point Kṛṣṇa advised Arjuna not to waste precious time combating Droṇa and he was better left alone. Arjuna agreed, inviting in the process severe criticism from Droṇa. Droṇa smiled in ridicule and asked Arjuna: "Where are you proceeding? You are known for not leaving your opponent and turning away without first defeating him (*tato 'bravīd smayan droṇaḥ kvedaṁ pāṇḍava gamyate/nanu nāma raṇe śatrūn ajitvā na nivartase* 7.66.32). Later in the day, when Yudhiṣṭhira asked Sātyaki to go and assist Arjuna, he too like Arjuna bypassed Droṇa (7.88.24-29). Still later, fearing danger to both Arjuna and Sātyaki, Yudhiṣṭhira despatched Bhīma to their aid, and he too bypased Droṇa but with a difference. Bhīma held the pole of Droṇa's chariot and turned it over. Before Droṇa could mount another chariot to guard the entrance, Bhīma's charioteer whipped his horses and spurred his chariot well beyond the range of the Brāhmaṇa's arrows (7.103.15-19).

Thus Droṇa's first attempt to prevent the Pāṇḍava heroes from penetrating the Kaurava army failed, three major heroes managing to do so.

When Arjuna penetrated the Kaurava army, Duryodhana harshly criticized Droṇa as he was fearful that once Arjuna was inside the *vyūha* he would somehow reach Jayadratha and kill him. Droṇa answered that he was too old to leave the entrance of the *vyūha* and pursue the Pāṇḍava heroes (7.69.22-24). He advised Duryodhana, therefore, to halt Arjuna's onward march. When Duryodhana expressed his inability to withstand Arjuna's attack, Droṇa equipped him with special armour impierceable by even Arjuna's arrows (*eṣa te kavacaṁ rājaṁs tathā badhnāmi kāñcanam/yathā na bāṇā nāstrāṇi viṣahiṣyanti te raṇe* 7.69. 35-39). This was Droṇa's second *yoga*. True, with this special armour Duryodhana did not lose his life while in combat with Arjuna. However, he could not stop Arjuna's onward march.

Bhīma's pentration of the Kaurava army led to Duryodhana holding some hurried consultation with Droṇa once again. Such consultations by Duryodhana with generals of his army are not reported in the other *parvans* of the Mahābhārata. The purpose of such was to decide strategy for different contingencies (7.105.1-21). They show that Droṇa was not only a good teacher of the science of war-missiles but also a master of war-strategies. Unfortunately for the Kauravas, all his manoeuvres to protect Jayadratha failed.

Jayadratha's slaying saw Droṇa vow not to remove his armour until he had finished the Pāñcālas (*nāhatvā sarvapāñcālān kavacasya vimokṣaṇam* 7.126.32.). That evening he did not allow the army to rest but ordered it instead to continue battle even during the night (*rātrāv api hi yotsyante saṁrabdhāḥ kurusṛṁjayāḥ* 7.126. 38). During the night and the next day this old general fought with such vehemence that fear struck the hearts of the Pāṇḍava warriors. They felt their end had come (7.164.64). At this stage Droṇa was misinformed about the death of Aśvatthāman. Extremely agitated, Droṇa seriously erred by using the *brahmāstra* on ordinary soliders (7.164.79) – a transgression and his last *yoga* to help the Kauravas. It, of course, involved *adharma* (7.164.79) – not of the kind of minimum *adharma* used by Kṛṣṇa, but very serious *adharma*. Understandably the act invited all round condemnation and Droṇa had to lay down arms lest he committeed more blunders. Soon afterwards Droṇa was killed.

On the following two days Karṇa led the Kaurava forces. At the end of the first day Karṇa realized that he was superior to Arjuna in many respects. His bow, Vijaya, fashioned by Viśvakarman for Indra, had come to him through his teacher Paraśurāma. This bow was superior to Arjuna's Gāṇḍīva (8.22.36-40,45-46). Arjuna, felt Karṇa, was not his equal in handling arrows and in the use of the *astras* as well (8.22.35). But he was inferior to Arjuna in one respect (8.22.45). Arjuna's chariot could not be damaged by arms, was drawn by very swift horses, was marked by a banner with a monkey on it who struck wonder in the heart of the opponents. More importantly, Arjuna's real advantage was having Kṛṣṇa as his charioteer. (8.22.47). To bridge this gap, Karṇa told Duryodhana: "We have Śalya, the king of the Madras, on our side. He is well-known for his skill in managing the horses, and is even superior to Kṛṣṇa in this respect. If he can be persuaded to act as my charioteer, victory is yours" (8.22.50, 53-58).

The next day Śalya became Karṇa's charioteer. As seen in the first chapter, the duty of a charioteer was to ensure the safety of his hero and to guard the interests of his side. He also occasionally advised the hero. The hero too must have complete faith in his charioteer, as Arjuna had in Kṛṣṇa, and act on his advice without objection and hesitation. But Karṇa was too proud for this and paid heavily. Śalya on one occasion suggested a *yoga* to Karṇa. Karṇa took the deadly arrow on which lay Aśvasena nāga and which he had specially preserved for Arjuna (8.66.5-6), and loaded the bow. Śalya foresaw that Kṛṣṇa would employ some *yoga* to dodge the arrow. A skilled charioteer, he correctly anticipated Kṛṣṇa's action to save Arjuna. He told Karṇa that his arrow was going to miss Arjuna's neck and that he should adjust his aim. Karṇa disregarded Śalya, arrogantly replying instead that he never aimed twice (*na saṁdhatte dviḥ śaraṁ śalya karṇaḥ* 8.66.8). The result was that Karṇa missed. Soon afterwards Karṇa was killed by Arjuna.

We have already seen Śakuni's role in the game of dice. Śakuni, like his son Ulūka, was a great hero (*samare śūraḥ śakuniḥ* 7.146.28; 7.131.17). Proof of this lies in the fact that both father and son managed to survive seventeen days of the war, falling only on the last day after the fall of Śalya. Duryodhana told Śakuni on two occasions that his hope for victory rode on him (*jayāśā me tvayi sthitā* 7.131.87; 7.145.63). Śakuni, master of the game of dice (*nikṛtiprajña*), also knew a number of *māyās* of warfare (*māyāśataviśāradaḥ* 7.19.15).[3] In a duel with Arjuna, he deluded Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa with his *māyās* (*kṛṣṇau saṁmohayan māyāṁ vidadhe śakunis tataḥ* 7.29.15). However, Arjuna knew how to couter these *māyās*. Hence Śakuni had to accept defeat in the duel and retire (7.29. 16-27).

Śakuni was never made the general of the Kaurava army and hence had no opportunity to suggest any *yoga* in this capacity. On one occasion,[4] however, after the fall of Śalya, he did make one suggestion to Duryodhana. The Pāṇḍavas had begun mercilessly decimating the army of Śalya. Śakuni first took Duryodhana to task for tolerating the rout of the Madra army (9.17.20), reminded him that they had all agreed to fight jointly (*sahitair nāma yoddhavyam ity eṣa samayaḥ kṛtaḥ* 9.17.20), and advised Duryodhana to make common cause and launch a combined attack on the Pāṇḍavas (9.17.23-24).

This joint effort was of no avail. Subsequently Śakuni, although not appointed general of the army, planned a *yoga*, a strategy, on his own. He, with his army of one thousand horses, led an attack on the Pāṇḍava cavalry. This attack was apparently effective although many cavalrymen on his side also died. Śakuni then told Duryodhana that since he had finished the Pāṇḍava cavalry, he (Duryodhana) should attack the chariot-fighters advancing in the front, promising to tackle the elephant-riders and infantrymen himself (9.23.1, 8-10). But Śakuni's *yoga* was not to succeed. In the fierce battle that ensued, Śakuni's son, Ulūka, was slain by Sahdeva; a short time later Śakuni also fell victim to Sahadeva's *bhalla* (9.27.29, 57-58).

---

[3] With these *māyās* Śakuni could create many weapons, or release floods of water, or produce darkness 7. 29. 16-26.

[4] Earlier, when Droṇa was the general, Śakuni's atrocious suggestion that they all jointly attack and crush Abhimanyu before he killed the Kaurava heroes one by one was rightly ignored 7.47.16.

Thus ended the life of Śakuni, the successful *yogeśvara* of the Kauravas in *dyūta*, but less sucessful with his *yoga* in the war.

3. Aftermath of the war: Duryodhana's defeat at Bhīma's hands virtually ended the war for the Pāṇḍavas. It should have ended for the Kauravas too, but as it happened, it took a most unexpected turn.

When Aśvatthāman, Kṛpa, and Kṛtavarman, the three surviving Kaurava heroes, learnt of the fall of Duryodhana, they met him injured and lying on the ground. Seeing his king in that condition and remembering the way Droṇa was slain, Aśvatthāman vowed within earshot of Duryodhana that he would destory all the Pāñcālas in the presence of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. He sought Duryodhana's permnission to do so. Delighted to hear Aśvatthāman's vow, Duryodhana asked Kṛpa to bring some water and consecrate Aśvatthāman as the general of the Kurava army (*mamājñayā dvijaśreṣṭha droṇaputro 'bhiṣicyatām/ senāpatyena* 9.64.39).

Aśvatthāman, having vowed in a fit of anger, soon realized how difficult this was to fulfil. Lying under a banyan tree in the dark hours of the night, he saw a strange sight. A certain owl (*ulūka, kauśika* 10.1.36, 42, 43) crawled stealthily on the branch of a tree where crows happily and confidently (*sukham, visrabdhāḥ* 10.22.35-36) slept. The owl reached the crows without arousing them and butchered them all in succession. This incident showed Aśvatthāman the means to fulfil his almost impossible vow. He admitted to himself that it was impossible for him to defeat the Pāṇḍavas on the battlefield, and that his vow was suicidal (10.1.45-46). The owl had tendered him advice which was most expendient (*yukta*) under the circumstances (*upadeśaḥ kṛto 'nena pakṣiṇā mama saṁyuge/śatrūṇām kṣapaṇe yuktaḥ prāptakālaś ca me mataḥ* 10.1.44). He, therefore, decided to kill the Pāṇḍava and Pāñcāla heroes at night while they, like the crows, slept happily and fully assured (*adya svapsyanti pāñcālā viśvastā jitakāśinaḥ/... harṣeṇa ca samanvitāḥ* 10.3.25).

We know what happened thereafter at night in the camp of the Pāṇḍavas. It is not necessary to describe in detail the ghastly nocturnal incident. Aśvatthāman mercilessly butchered all the sleeping heroes – Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Śikhaṇḍin,the five sons of Draupadī, and the rest. Anyone who tried to escape through the gates was felled by Kṛpa and Kṛtavarman's arrows, both of whom lay in wait.

An owl suggested this last '*yoga*' of the war to Aśvatthāman, the execution of which involved serious transgressions of numerous rules of the war. The cruelty is without parallel. Like his father Droṇa who had unscrupulously unleashed the *brahmāstra* on ordinary soldiers, Aśvatthāman also felt no qualms earlier in slaying warriors with the *nārāyaṇāstra*. Both father and son were apt to commit cruelty in trying circumstances. The execution of the last '*yoga*' turned out to be as ghastly as only could be imagined with an owl as the guide and Aśvatthāman as the executor.

What is the meaning of this senseless killing which left only eight survivors: the five Pāṇḍavas, Kṛṣṇa, Sātyaki and Dhṛṣṭadyumna's charioteer, who apparently had a miraculous escape?

This writer has elsewhere[5] expressed his opinion that the author of the Mahābhārata may have seen a meaning in this senseless killing. It seems to exemplify the working of Nemesis or retributive justice. This contention is based on some points of similarity between the fire at the Khāṇḍava forest and the terrible happenings in the Pāṇḍava camp. The similarities are so striking that one cannot escape the feeling that the two are connected. With the most unexpected death of his dear and near, Arjuna seems to have been punished for his senseless massacre of the denizens of the Khāṇḍava forest. Kṛṣṇa too is not spared for he was Arjuna's associate in reducing the Khāṇḍava forest to ashes. He had, therefore, to helplessly witness the Yādavas killing each other. He was himself later mistaken for a deer and shot dead by a hunter. Thus his last wish to end his life while practising penance eluded him. The master of the stratagems (*yogeśvara*), who saw

---

[5] "Nemesis and some Mahābhārata Episodes" *Amṛtadhārā* (Prof. R.N. Dandekar Felicitation volume), 1984, pp. 274-79.

Arjuna and the Pāṇḍavas successfully through the war, had no stratagem to save himself – Nemesis took its course.

To conclude the note on *yogeśvara* : corresponding to the Yogeśvara Kṛṣṇa of the Pāṇḍavas, the Kauravas availed themselves of three[6] Yogeśvaras on three occasions: Śakuni for the game of dice, Droṇa during the war, and an owl for the last act. The first and the last *yogeśvaras* were successful, whereas Droṇa, the second was not.

An Excursus: Comparison with the Rāmāyaṇa war

The Rāmāyaṇa describes the war between Rāma and Rāvaṇa. It was a conflict between good and evil. Rāvaṇa's abduction of Sītā was an outrage committed on Rāma. Rāma's duty as a Kṣatriya was to fight with Rāvaṇa to win Sītā back, exactly as it was the duty of the Pāṇḍavas to fight with the Kauravas to regain their share of the kingdom. In spite of this similarity between the motives of the two wars it is the Mahābhārata war, not the Rāmāyaṇa war, which is customarily referred to as a *dharmyuddha*. Patañjali, for example, while commenting on the Vārttika 2 on Pāṇini 3.2.122 gives in his Mahābhāṣya the example *dharmeṇa ha sma kuravo yudhyante* "The Kurus (i.e. those born in the family of Kuru (the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas) fought according to *dharma*" to exemplify the use of the particle *sma* with the present tense of the verb to describe an act committed in the past. According to Patañjali, the war fought at Kurukśetra was a *dharmayuddha*. Patañjali's example also confirms our view that the word *dharmayuddha,* as applied to the Mahābhārata war, means a war fought according to certain agreed rules. And this is something very specific to the Mahābhārata war. No other war is known to have been preceded by a conference of the leaders of the two sides to agree upon a certain code of conduct (*samaya)* consisting of so many rules (*dharmas*).

It is not suggested here that there were no rules for the Rāmāyaṇa war. But these rules were not such as were specially agreed upon before the war by Rāma and Rāvaṇa at a meeting. Both of them did follow the rules generally prevalent in those times. At one instance in the Rāmāyaṇa,[7] Rāma, while dissuading Lakṣmaṇa from making use of the *brahmāstra* at a morally inappropriate time, reminds him of a few rules to be followed in the war – the ones we have already learnt from the Mahābhārata.

---

[6] The number could be four if we add Śalya to the list.

There are many points of similarity between the rules of the Rāmāyaṇa – and the Mahābhārata – war.

In the Mahābhārata war, a challenge was issued to the opponent before he was attacked. No one was taken unawares. This is true of the Rāmāyaṇa as well, which provides many examples of challenges. Rāma said to Rāvaṇa : “Stay, stay, oh tiger among the Rākṣasas ! Having done me an unpleasant act, where can you find escape?" (*tiṣṭha tiṣṭha mama tvaṁ hi kṛtvā vipriyam īdṛaśam/kva nu rākṣasaśārdūla gato mokṣam avāpsyasi* 6.47. 121-123). Atikāya, son of Rāvaṇa , while issuing challenge to Rāma said: “Whoever thinks he has necessary strength and determination may come forward to fight with me’ (*yasyāsti śaktir vyavasāyayuktā dadātu me kṣipram ihādya yuddham* 6.59.44).[8]

Some of the heroes in the Mahābhārata, particularly Droṇa, proclaimed their names while issuing challenges. The same is true of the Rāmāyaṇa. Rāma, while issuing a challenge to Kumbhakarṇa, said: “Know me to be Rāma” (6.55.100). Rākṣasas Atikāya and Virūpākṣa proclaimed their names to engender terror in the hearts of the monkeys (6.59.5-6).

As in the Mahābhārata, we come across verbal duels in the Rāmāyaṇa. Considering the extent of the Rāmāyaṇa as compared to the Mahābhārata, such verbal duels abound, they being even longer than in the latter epic. The verbal duels between Atikāya and Lakṣmaṇa (6.59. 49-63), between Makarākṣa and Rāma (6.66. 10-19), and between Indrajit and Lakṣmaṇa (6.75-76) are some examples.

Combat between equals was inherently impossible in the Rāmāyaṇa, for the battle was fought not between the Kṣatriyas on either side, but between the monkeys and the bears on one side and the Rākṣasas on the other. Hence equality from the point of view of conveyance and weapons was out of the question. The Rākṣasa heroes fought in chariots while their opponents, including Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, fought on foot. Only for the final duel between Rāma and Rāvaṇa did the gods, due to the uneven nature of combat between the two, remove this inequality by sending Indra's chariot for Rāma (*bhūmisthitasya rāmasya rathasthasya ca rakṣasaḥ/na samaṁ yuddham ity āhur devagandharvadānavāḥ* 6.90.4).

---

[7] Rāmāyaṇa 6.67.38: “One who is not fighting, one who is hiding, who has surrendered with folded hands, who is running away, or is inattentive should not be attacked.” From here onwards the Rāmāyaṇa references are to its critical Edition, Baroda.

[8] Also cf. 6.34.4; 6.45.41; 6.62. 41-49.

The two sides of the Rāmāyaṇa war were also unevenly matched with respect to weapons. Whereas the Rākṣasas fought with conventional weapons like bows and arrows, swords, *śakti, śūla,* etc. (6.7.2; 6.22.20-21; 6.32.28, 30, etc.), the monkeys and the bears used nails, teeth and palms as well as trees and rocks (6.4.51; 6.11.6; 6.18.7; 6.28.29; 6.31.35, etc.). Only Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa used bows and arrows.

A third aspect of the combat between equals was that the two warriors so engaged should be equal in training, experience,etc. Most of the duels in the Rāmāyaṇa were fought by major warriors on both sides. Atikāya boasted that he hever fought with opponents who were not his equals (*na prākṛtaṁ kaṁacana yodhayāmi* 6.59.44). Rāma once disallowed Lakṣmaṇa from employing the *brahmāstra* as it would unnecessarily kill numerous ordinary Rākṣasas unequal to him (Lakṣmaṇa). Rāma's words: "It is not proper to kill many in attempting to kill one person (i.e. Indrajit)" (6.67.37) remind one of Bhīma's to Droṇa: "How are you not ashamed to kill many for the sake of one (i.e. Aśvatthāman)" (Mbh.7.165.31). However, Rāma himself slew, though not with the *brahmāstra* many ordinary Rākṣasas, as the Rākṣasa heroes too killed many ordinary monkeys (6.81.15 ff.; 6.81.28-29; 6.59.35; 6.61.12; 6.83.40; 6. 84. 1-5).

One of the rules agreed upon for the Mahābhārata war prohibited warriors from killing certain opponents: those who felt assured against attack, those who swooned, etc. This rule was valid for the Rāmāyaṇa as well. The warriors who ceased combat and became onlookers of an interesting duel were not attacked (6.95.2, 4, 5). Atikāya was proud of the fact that he never killed anyone not engaged in combat (*nāyudhyamānaṁ nijaghāna* *kaṁcit* 6.59.43).

No one in the Rāmāyaṇa war killed his opponent if he was in a swoon. In a duel between Aṅgada and Mahāpārśva, the latter swooned. But Aṅgada did not strike Mahāpārśva while he was in this condition. Combat resumed when Mahāpārśva regained consciousness (6.86.10; also cf. 6.47. 128-132 where Rāma permitted Rāvaṇa to return home as he was tired; 6.47.20 where Rāvaṇa ceased combat with Hanūmant, who had fainted, and moved on to Nīla).

When on a certain occasion Rāvaṇa was disheartened while fighting with Rāma (*vighūrṇahṛdaya* 6.92.27), his charioteer drove the chariot away, which, as seen was the normal practice in the Mahābhārata war. Rāvaṇa did not approve of the charioteer's act and suspected him to have received favours from the enemies (*satyo 'yaṁ pratitarko me pareṇa tvam upaskṛtaḥ* 6.93.7). The charioteer denied this stating that he drove the chariot away due to Rāvaṇa and the horses being fatigued (6.92.27; 6.93. 1-16). Here the charioteer told Rāvaṇa what was expected of a chariooter. This reminds us of what Śalya told Karṇa while acting as his charioteer (8.28.5-8).

In the Rāmāyaṇa war, there is no instance of a disarmed opponent being attacked. At one instance in combat with Rāma, Makarākṣa, his weapons being destroyed in succession, his horses being killed, and his charioteer being severely wounded, rushed towards Rāma with raised fist, an apparent challenge to a wrestling bout. Rama, considering himself unequal, released the *pāvakāstra*,on Makarākṣa and killed him (6.66.28-36). This is very similar to the Mahābhārata incident where Yudhiṣṭhira, in like circumstances, killed Śalya with his *śakti*.

The Rāmāyaṇa points out that an adversary in difficulty could be attacked and killed. A battle between Sugrīva and Mahodara led to hand-to-hand combat. Suddenly both warriors resorted to swords and shields that lay on the battlefield. Mahodara attempted a heavy blow which Sugrīva fielded with his shield, the result being that the sword lodged in the shield. Mahodara tried to wrench the sword free but Sugrīva lost no time and decapitated his opponent (6.85.19-27). This incident is instructive, showing that there was no real basis in Karṇa's appeal to Arjuna not to shoot an arrow until he had extricated the chariot wheel from the crevice.

The warriors of the Rāmāyaṇa war, like those of the Mahābhārata, did not observe the inviolability of the charioteers and the horses. The instances of violation in the Rāmāyaṇa are, however, naturally few as there were no chariots or charioteers in Rāma's army. But Rāvaṇa and his principal heroes in chariots lost a few charioteers and horses. Indrajit lost his charioteers twice, first at Aṅgada's and later at Lakṣmaṇa's hands. Lakṣmaṇa acted on Vibhīṣanas advice, destroying Indrajit's chariot, charioteer and horses[9] (6.74.6) – just like Aṅgada (6.77.29-30). Lakṣmaṇa also slew Rāvaṇa 's chariooter (6.88.15). Rāvaṇa struck Mātali with arrows when he drove Rāma's chariot but without success (6.96.11-12). Rāma and Rāvaṇa shot arrows at the each other's horses, as if imitating one another (*kṛtānukṛtakāriṇau* 6.95.26; 6.95.14; 6.96.8-9).

Now to concentrate on the charioteer and his functions. As reported in the Mahābhārata, in the Rāmāyaṇa too a charioteer looked upon his chariot as his *kutuṁba* (6.93.20). Rāvaṇa's charioteer, as already stated lists the duties of a charioteer (6.93.17-20). Herein he specifically states that a charioteer should observe the ascents and descents and the crevices on the battlefield (*sthalanimnāni bhūmeś ca samāni viṣamāṇi ca* (*vijñeyāni* 6.93.10). This confirms the speculation that in the Mahābhārata war Kṛṣṇa must have minutely observed the battlefield to effect Karṇa's wheel being stuck in a crevice.

As in the Mahābhārata war, in Rāmāyaṇa war a day's battle ended at sunset (6.33.46). Also, as in the Mahābhārata,the battle was once continued throughout the night (6.34.2).

With regard to the use of *yoga* in the sense of an expendient means calculated to tide over a difficult situation, it may be said that the role of *yogeśvara* in the Rāmāyaṇa was played by Vibhīṣaṇa who, on certain occasions, tendered highly valuable advice to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Vibhīṣaṇa left his brother Rāvaṇa and joined Rāma (6.10.20; 6.11.1). In the Mahābhārata too, Yuyutsu, one of the Kauravas, left his brother Duryodhana just before the war and joined the Pāṇḍavas (Mbh. 6.42. 89-95).

---

[9] The monkey-chiefs killed the horses of Indrajit 6.77. 33-36.

Yuyutsu, however, had no special help to offer to the Pāṇḍavas. He had no Kaurava secrets to divulge (as in Vibhiṣaṇa's case) because there were none. The Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas knew one another well. They learnt the use of weapons and missiles from the same teacher. Each side knew the other's strengths and weaknesses. But this was not the case in the Rāmāyaṇa. Rāma and Rāvaṇa knew little of each other and also differed in many respects. Rāma's allies too, the monkeys and the bears, were unknown to him. His alliance with Sugrīva was contractual, not natural as was the case with the allies of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. Vibhīṣaṇa, by revealing Rāvaṇa's secrets, had, therefore, much to contribute to Rāma's seccess. Thus it would not be an exaggeration to say that Rāma without Vibhīṣaṇa would have found situation difficult to handle just as the Pāṇḍavas would have found it without Kṛṣṇa.

Indrajit, Rāvaṇa's celebrated son and a warrior of much fame, often employed *māyā* in war.[10] This was not unusual for the Rākṣasas. Ghaṭotkaca, Bhīma's Rākṣasa son from Hiḍimbā, also employed *māyā* in the Mahābhārata war (Mbh. 6.60. 49-50; 7.149.27,129; 7.150.31). But Indrajit was more accomplished in its use (6.72.15-16). He was the only Rākṣasa on Rāvaṇa's side who performed rites of *tantric* nature before going to war (6.67.4-10). Once he created an illusory Sita, bound her to his chariot, and killed her with his sword on the battlefield in the presence of the monkey-chiefs (6.68.5-29). This report thoroughly disheartened Rāma and he swooned (6.70.7-10). As the monkey-chiefs were attempting to bring Rāma back to consciousness with the use of fragrant water (6.70.11-12), Lakṣmaṇa trying to console him, Vibhīṣaṇa arrived with the information that an illusory Sītā had been slain as a means of deception. Vibhīṣaṇa argued that since Rāvaṇa intensely desired Sītā, her death at Indrajit's hands was an impossibility (6.71.9-15). On another occasion Indrajit had gone to Nikuṁbhilā, to the west of Laṅkā, to perform a sacrifice in a *caitya* (6.89.23-26; 6.72.27). It was essential for someone of Rāma's army to reach Nikuṁbhilā in time and put an end to Indrajit's sacrifice, which, once completed, would render the demon

[10] Indrajit is described as *mahāmāya* 6.72.16; *māyāvīrya* 7.72.18; *māyābalaviśārada* 6.72.20; *māyāparamadhārmika* 6.73.4.

invincible (6.71.13-22).Vibhīṣaṇa further informed Rāma that Indrajit had received a powerful missile, known as *brahmaśiras*, and a boon from Brahmadeva. This boon guaranteed that Indrajit could not be killed by anyone who did not disturb Indrajit making offerings in the fire at Nikuṁbhilā (6.72.12-13). So Vibhīṣaṇa took Lakṣmaṇa near a *nyagrodha* tree inside which Indrajit made offerings to *bhūtas* (*ihopahāraṁ bhūtānām balavān rāvaṇātmajaḥ/upahṛtya tataḥ paścāt saṅgrāmam abhivartate* 6.74.4,6,25). Lakṣmaṇa disturbed Indrajit's *tantric* practices and in the fierce battle that ensued Lakṣmaṇa put the formidable *aindra* missile to his bow. Before releasing it, he performed a *satyakriyā*. He said: "If Rāma, the son of Daśaratha, is virtuous-minded (*dharmātmā*), attached to truth (*satyasandha*), and unrivalled in performing manly deeds (*pauruṣe cāpratidvandvaḥ*) then let this arrow kill the son of Rāvaṇa" (6.78.31). The arrow killed Indrajit.[11] While reporting the death of Indrajit to Rāvaṇa the reporters quite correctly stated that Lakṣmaṇa, helped by Vibhīṣaṇa, killed Indrajit (*yuddhe hato mahārāja lakṣmaṇena tavātmajaḥ/ vibhīṣaṇasahāyena* 6.80.2). Vibhīṣaṇa's contribution to Lakṣmaṇa's success was extremely crucial. Had it not been for his suggestion, for his *yoga*, it would have been difficult for Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to vanquish Indrajit. Indrajit accused Vibhīṣaṇa of treachery since he had divulged the secrets of his relations with whom he grew up (*iha tvam jātasaṁvṛddhaḥ sākṣād bhrātā pitur mama/katham druhyasi putrasya pitṛvyo mama rākṣasa* 6.74.11).[12]

In the Mahābhārata war, the *yogeśvara* of the Pāṇḍavas acted as Arjuna's charioteer. In the Rāmāyaṇa war this was not possible in the case of Rāma or Lakṣmaṇa as they had no charioteers. The only occasion on which Rāma used a chariot[13] was during the final duel when Indra sent him his chariot. Mātali, Rāma's charioteer in this instance, did suggest a *yoga* to Rāma. Rāma's ordinary arrows proved ineffective against Rāvaṇa, the demon sprouting a new head whenever it was severed (by Rāma's arrows). Mātali came to Rāma's aid, reminding him to use the *brahmāstra* (*atha saṁsmārayām āsa rāghavaṁ mātalis tadā/ ...visṛjāsmai vadhāya tvam astraṁ paitāmahaṁ prabho* 6.97.1-2).

---

[11] One is reminded here of a similar *satyakriyā* performed by Arjuna before he discharged his arrow to claim the head of Karṇa. He said: "If I have practised penance, if I have satisfied the elders, if I have done what I promised to friends in accordance with their desires, then, with the force of this truth, may the arrow kill Karṇa" (8.67.20)

[12] Vibhīṣaṇa also made some minor contributions like recognizing Śuka and Sāraṇa, the spies of Rāvaṇa (6.16.9-13). He also discovered some other spies of Rāvaṇa (6.20.22; 7.21.7). Four counsellers of Vibhīṣaṇa changed themselves into birds and procured information on Rāvaṇa's arrangements to protect Laṅkā 6.28.7-9.

[13] The other possible instance when Rāma was not standing on the ground

In the Rāmāyaṇa war, there is no single instance of the employment of a *yoga* which involved some kind of *anyāya* or *adharma*, as in the Mahābhārata, for example, Duryodhana being struck down by Bhīma, Bhūriśravas' swordhand being severed by Arjuna; that there is no instance of *adharma* in the Rāmāyaṇa holds true inspite of the fact that the Rākṣasas were reputed for crooked behaviour (*nityajihmā hi rākṣasāḥ* 6.40.54) or that the Rākṣasas were said to be battling mysteriously while persons like Rāma were staightforward (6.40.53). At the most, one may point to the Indrajit's attempt to dishearten Rāma and his allies by killing an illusory Sītā as an instance of cheating. This bears some similarity to the false proclamation of Aśvatthāman's death calculated to dishearten Droṇa. But both these *yogas* had limited objectives and were not meant for putting the adversary permanently out of action. Indrajit occasionally made use of *māyā* and remained invisible to his foes on the battlefield (6.34.28-30; 6.67. 21-23; 15,17). This was to some extent unfair and created a serious handicap for the opponent. But no one on Rāma's side ever accused Indrajit of fighting unrighteously on this account, simply because Indrajit did not slay anyone while invisible. He was, therefore, no more than simply a great nuisance.

The Mahābhārata war and the Rāmāyaṇa war thus have striking similarities. Although the rules for the Rāmāyaṇa war were not specifically stated, it was fought in the large measure on the same lines as the Mahābhārata war. Inspite of the fact that there were some violations of the rules in the Rāmāyaṇa war – the killing of the charioteers, horses, ordinary soldiers by superior warriors – it should be clear from the comparison made that Rāmāyaṇa war has better claims to be called a *dharmayuddha* than the Mahābhārata war.

---

while fighting was when Hanūmant served him as a vehicle (6.47.124).

2578

The Mahābhārata war is specially characterized as a *dharmayuddha* apparently because it was meant to be fought in accordance with certain rules agreed upon by the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. An examination of these rules reveals that although some of the rules were observed, others were violated, and the violations were on both sides. Thus, the Mahābhārata has really no claim to be called a *dharmayuddha*.

In the context of Gītā 18.78, the word *Yogeśvara* can only mean 'the master of expedient means of war strategems'. An examination of Kṛṣṇa's role as a *Yogeśvara* in this sense reveals that he did not suggest any *yoga* for the fall of Bhīṣma, Jayadratha and Bhūriśravas. He had no doubt contributed *yogas* for the fall of Droṇa, Karṇa, Duryodhana, and possibly Śalya. Of these, no element of *adharma* was invloved for the fall of Karṇa (and Śalya), but it was certainly present in the *yogas* calculated for the fall of Droṇa and Duryodhana.

The Kauravas availed themselves of more than one *Yogeśvara* although none of them was so called. This point is best treated in three contexts: (i) Before the war: In the game of dice—the first means employed by the Kauravas to deprive the Pāṇḍavas of their riches—Śakuni acted as the *Yogeśvara;* (ii) In the war proper neither Bhīṣma, nor Karṇa, nor Śalya acted as the *Yogeśvara;* it was Droṇa who, during his term of leadership and Śalya, when he acted as Karṇa's charioteer, suggested certain *yogas*; (iii) The last *'Yogeśvara'* of the Kauravas was an owl who showed Aśvatthāman the way to eliminate his adversaries while they were asleep.

M.A. MEHENDALE (b. 1918) has taught Sanskrit and Linguistics since 1944. He started his career as a lecturer in Ardhamagadhi, in Basaveshvar College Bagalkot, and taught at Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune. He has been Editor of *Epilogue to the Mahābhārata*, published by Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune since 1983.

Dr. Mehendale is author of a number of books and has also contributed research papers in national and international journals.

ISBN 81-85952-24-8

Rs. 75

037
116